CBW

Number One
For PSV Professionals

COACH AND BUS WEEK Wednesday May 31, 2006 **Issue 732** £2.50

1st with coach and bus news every Wednesday

THIS WEEK

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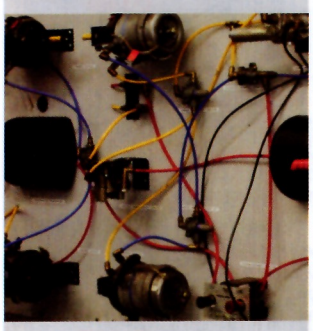
On the road with the French giant's nine seater, **page 38**

Training Special

All the latest training providers plus in-depth profiles **page 31**



Isle of Wight

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Is this the future?

Cardiff Bus says its high-spec Scania will get people out of their cars and into the passenger seat **page 9**

Quality Used Vehicles
New Special Offer Prices

1996 DENNIS JAVELIN 290 GX BERKHOF EXCELLANCE
6 Speed ZF gearbox, 49 seats, curtains, double glazing, air conditioning, rear toilet, rear continental door, servery, water boiler, drinks machine, radio/pa/cassette, video, 1 x monitor, wheel trims
Price: £50,000

1999 IVECO MAXIM 1
6 speed gearbox, 29 reclining seats, courier seat, seat belts, curtains, thermoking air conditioning, webasto/auxiliary heater, Radio/pa/cassette, wheel trims,
Price: £ 32,000

2001 SCANIA K113 VANHOOL T9
7 Speed comfort shift, 49 seats, aisle carpets, curtains, double glazing, air conditioning, retarder, centre toilet, continental door, servery, water boiler, drinks machine, courier fridge, radio/pa/cassette, video, monitor, wheel trims
Price: £120,000

DAF

1999 DAF PLAXTON 350, 4 x 4 gearbox,53 seats,recliners,courier seat,seat belts,footrests,curtains,double glazing,continental door..... £78,000
1998 DAF 11.6 BOVA FUTURA, 6 speed gearbox, 49 seats, carpets, curtains, double glazing, A/C, retarder, servery, fridge, radio/pa/cassette, video..... £80,000
1997 DAF SB3000 PLAXTON PREMIERE 49 seats, easy shift gearbox,air conditioning, curtains,double glazed, centre continental door, power Door ,toilet,tv/video, drinks, fridge..... £62,000
1995 DAF BOVA FUTURA, 49 seats, ZF 6 speed gear box, foot rests, curtains, double glazing, air conditioning, retarder, centre toilet, continental door servery, water boiler, drinks machine, fride, video/monitor, radio/pa/cassette, wheel trims..... £45,000
1991 DAF MB230 CAETANO ALGARVE I, 6 Speed Splitter gearbox, 49 seats, curtains, centre toilet, servery, water boiler, drinks machine, radio/pa/cassette..... £16,500

DENNIS

1997 DENNIS JAVELIN 245 MARCO POLO EXPLORER, 6 Speed ZF gearbox, 53 seats, curtains, double glazing, rear continental door..... £50,000

IVECO

2003 IVECO BEULAS MIDISTAR, 6 speed gearbox, 32 reclining seats, double glazing, air-conditioning, webasto, retarder, cruise control, rear toilet, rear continental door, servery, water boiler,drinks machine, fridge/courier fridge, radio/pa/cassette, video/monitors, wheel trims..... £112,500
2002 IVECO BEULAS EL MUNDO, 6 speed gearbox, 32 reclining seats, 3 point seat belts, double glazing, air-conditioning, webasto, retarder, cruise control, rear toilet, rear continental door, servery, water boiler,drinks machine, fridge/courier fridge, radio/pa/cassette, video/monitors, wheel trims..... £125,000
2002 IVECO EURORIDER BEULAS STERGO E, 8 Speed manual gearbox, 49 seats, 3 point seatbelts, curtains, aisle carpets, double glazing, A/C webasto, Telma, centre continental door, video, drinks machine..... £115,000
2002 IVECO EURORIDER BEULAS STERGO E, 8 Speed manual gearbox, 53 seats, 3 point seatbelts, curtains, aisle carpets, double glazing, A/C..... £117,500
2001 IVECO BEULAS STERGO E, 8 speed manual gearbox, 51 seats, double glazing, air-conditioning, webasto, courier fridge, radio/pa/cassette, TV/Video..... £100,000
2001 IVECO BEULAS STERGO E, 8 speed gearbox, 49 seats, air con, Webasto,toilet,cup holder,drinks machine,courier fridge,radio/pa/cassette, video/monitors..... £105,000
2000 IVECO BEULAS STERGO E, 8 Speed gearbox, 49 seats, A/C, curtains,double glazed, telma,power door, toilet, tv/video,drinks,fridge..... £90,000
1999 IVECO BEULAS STERGO E, 8 speed gearbox, 51 seats, air conditioning, curtains, double glazing, Telma, toilet, radio/pa/cassette, TV/video, drinks, fridge..... £75,000
1999 IVECO BEULAS STERGO E, 8 Speed gearbox, 49 seats, A/C curtains,double glazed, telma, power door, toilet, tv/video, drinks, fridge..... £80,000
1999 IVECO BEULAS STERGO E, Manual gearbox, 49 seats, curtains, double glazing, A/C, webasto, retarder, centre toilet, continental door, drinks..... £80,000
1997 IVECO BEULAS STERGOE E, 8 Speed gearbox, 49 seats, aisle carpets,curtains/blinds, double glazing, A/C, webasto/, toilet, servery..... £70,000
1996 IVECO BEULAS STERGO E, 6 speed gearbox, 49 seats, double glazing, A/C retarder, rear toilet, continental door, drinks machine..... £60,000
2001 IVECO CC80 INDCAR MAXIM 1, 6 Speed gearbox, 29 Seats, A/C curtains,power door,radio/PA/cassette..... £50,000
1999 IVECO INDCAR MAXIM I , 6 Speed gearbox, 29 seats, aisle carpets, curtains, A/C, water boiler, fridge, radio/pa/cd..... £40,000
1998 IVECO INDCAR MAXIM I 6 Speed gearbox, 28 seats, curtains, A/C ,water boiler, fridge, radio/pa/cassette,video..... £32,000

MERC

1995 MERCEDES 609D OLYMPUS, 5 Speed gearbox, 21seats, Seat belts, blinds..... £15,000

MAN

2001 MAN 13.220 MARCO POLO 330, 6 Speed ZF gearbox, 37 seats, carpets, curtains/blinds, double glazing, continental door, wheel trim..... £75,000
2001 MAN 24.400 NOGE CATALAN STAR 370, 8 speed gearbox, 49 seats, A/C curtains, double glazing,power door, toilet, TV/video, drinks, fridge..... £112,500
1999 MAN MARCOPOLO, 6 Speed gearbox, 49 seats, double glazing, air conditioning, toilet, drinks machine, radio/pa/cassette, 1 video/monitor, wheel trim..... £74,500

NEOPLAN

2005 MERC V6 NEOPLAN EUROLINER, 6 Speed ZF gearbox, 49 seats, double glazing, air conditioning, webasto, retarder, cruise control, drivers bunk, toilet continental door, servery, water boiler, drinks machine, fridge, radio/pa/cassette, video, monitor, wheel trims..... £175,000
2004 MERC V6 NEOPLAN EUROLINER, 6 speed ZF gearbox,49/53 seats, double glazing, A/C, webastso, drivers bunk, toilet,servery, water boiler..... £159,950
2003 MERC V6 NEOPLAN EUROLINER, 6 speed ZF gearbox,49/53 seats, double glazing, A/C, webastso, drivers bunk, toilet,servery, water boiler..... £149,950
2001 MAN 350 NEOPLAN TRANSLINER, 6 Speed gearbox, 49/53 seats, double glazing, A/C retarder, cruise control, drinks machine..... £110,000
2001 DENNIS GX NEOPLAN TRANSLINER, 6 Speed manual gearbox, 53 seats, Carpets,curtains,double glazing, A/C, Webasto,cruise controll..... £95,000
2000 MAN 350 NEOPLAN TRANSLINER, 6 speed gearbox, 53 reclining seats, aisle carpets, double glazing, A/C, retarder, cruise control..... £105,000
1999 DENNIS JAVELIN GX NEOPLAN TRANSLINER, 49 Seats,ZF 6 Speed gear box, A/C, double glazed,centre continental door, toilet, T.V./Video..... £69,500
1990 MERC V8 NEOPLAN CITYLINER, 7 speed manual gearbox, 49 seats, A/C, webasto, retarder, drivers bunk, servery, water boiler..... £20,000

SCANIA

1998 SCANIA L94 1B IRIZAR CENTURY, Automatic gearbox,49 seats, double glazing, A/C, rear toilet, rear continental door, servery, water boiler..... £80,000

TOYOTA

SOLD **1996 TOYOTA CAETANO OPTIMO III,** Manual gearbox, 1 8 seat, courier seat, seat belts, footrests, seat back nets, curtains, radio/pa/cassette..... £ SOLD SOLD SOLD

VOLVO

1998 VOLVO B10M PLAXTON PREMIER 3500, automatic gearbox, 53 seats, Recliners, courier seat, seat belts, curtains, double glazing, air con, radio/pa/cassette.. £74,000

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First Floor, 3 The Office Village,
Cygnet Park, Hampton,
Peterborough PE7 8FD

Switchboard 01733 293240
Fax 0845 280 2927
Web www.cbwnet.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Editor Mark Williams
01733 293243, mob 07720 769869
mark.williams@rouncymedia.co.uk
Technical and Minibus Editor
Martin Cole 01733 293245,
mob 07885 692144
martin.cole@rouncymedia.co.uk
News Editor Andrew Peace
01733 293244
andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk
Art Director Keith Simpson
01733 293240
keith.simpson@rouncymedia.co.uk
Office Manager Jacqui Grobler
01733 293240
jacqui.grobler@rouncymedia.co.uk

CONTRIBUTORS

Gabriel Conway (Eire) 0879 222070
Andrew Jarosz (North) 01132 566505
William Golden (Tourism)
william.golden@virgin.net

ADVERTISING

Advertising Manager
Vicki Culverhouse 01733 293246
vicki.culverhouse@rouncymedia.co.uk

Display Sales
Gary Kemp 01733 293247
gary.kemp@rouncymedia.co.uk

Classified Sales
Beth Foster 01733 293480
beth.foster@rouncymedia.co.uk

James Walton 01733 293249
james.walton@rouncymedia.co.uk

PUBLISHING

Director Derek Phillips 01733 293240
derek.phillips@rouncymedia.co.uk

Director Andy Sutcliffe 01733 293242
andrew.sutcliffe@rouncymedia.co.uk

Publisher Stephen Curtis
01733 293240
stephen.curtis@rouncymedia.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS

UK 0870 830 4969
Overseas + 44 1858 438782

CBW Subscriptions, Tower House,
Sovereign Park, Market Harborough,
Leics. LE16 9EF

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Gone shopping

Anyone who had the inclination to read the traffic commissioners' report a couple of weeks ago will have found many references to staff shortages.

In particular, several of the Magnificent Seven questioned the amount of resource they had for bus monitoring, but as with any 'police' force, I am sure that Stephen Tetlow of VOSA would very much like to have more VI officers 'on the ground' to enforce the system.

VOSA has instead taken the view that once an offender, always an offender, and will be giving its vehicle examiners and enforcement officers hand-held computers which can download the records of operators and so target those whose MoT pass rate, for example, is poor.

But that will, in my view, allow a number of poor operators to slip through the net. By definition, only those with history will be caught in the net. New starters and operators who have managed to effect an identity switch will be off the VOSA radar.

While VOSA may be slow in discovering who those operators are, I suspect reputable operators (and their drivers) will not. I am not surprised, therefore, that Brigadier Tom Macartney has strongly recommended that the industry polices itself.

Shopping a dodgy operator is, on the face of it, a shrewd business move; there is no moral reason why you, an operator who pays his bills and sticks to the rules, should tolerate competition from someone who does not. Apart from anything else, you could be enhancing the safety record of the industry.

But this isn't the first time we've heard this appeal. It hasn't fallen on deaf ears, but there is still a slight concern that, by raising your head above the parapet, you may become a target yourself. OK, so you may have nothing to fear, but who wants the disruption of a full fleet check?

I also know that some operators who have tipped the VI the wink about iffy operators have found out later that the result was a pre-announced check and no action. Operators need reassurance from VOSA that the right people will end up in the dock...

Mark Williams

Mark Williams
Editor

Coach and Bus Week is a supporter of the following organisations:

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Another kicking for the DfT

The pressure on government to give local authorities more control over bus services is building to new levels after the second high-profile report in as many months called for government to do more to increase bus use in the UK.

The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts published its 'Delivery Chain Analysis for Bus Services in England' report last week. It came just weeks after the Commons Transport Select Committee issued a critical report into falling bus patronage, and followed in the wake of another report calling for more action outside of London, published in December by the National Audit Office.

Edward Leigh MP, chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, says: "The Department for Transport has got to take more concerted action if it is to persuade people to get out of their cars and onto buses. In almost every part of the country, the 40 year downturn in bus usage continues."

"London stands apart from the rest of the country, with bus usage in the capital having soared by a third in recent years. It is far more difficult to turn things around in the unregulated bus market outside the capital. The Department must rely on the actions and commitment of local authorities who, in turn, can't directly influence operators in respect of their commercial routes."

"This does not mean that all the Department can do is stand on the touchline mildly exhorting the players to up their game. It can and should provide strong leadership," he says.

He went on to say that the DfT should agree 'demanding' targets for bus growth in the most congested areas and that authorities with low growth rates should learn from the better performing.

Alistair Carmichael MP

He concluded by saying: "The Department must do everything it can to encourage local authorities to work together and with the bus operators to make the bus an attractive and reliable way to travel."

Alistair Carmichael, the Liberal Democrat Shadow Transport Secretary, who serves on the Committee of Public Accounts, says: "Labour has comprehensively failed to meet its targets for increased bus use. The Government's approach has actually led to fewer passengers getting on board. However, bus use in many Liberal Democrat controlled areas, such as York and Cambridge are experiencing growth through effective partnerships with bus operators. If Douglas Alexander genuinely wishes to see more people getting out of their cars and on to buses, he must give local areas much greater flexibility and freedom over local services."

Transport Commissioner Peter Hendy CBE welcomed the endorsement of London's bus services, saying: "What we have seen in London in recent years shows that effective regulation, political will, prudent investment and, crucially, listening to what the public want and then delivering it to them can achieve."

Roy Wicks, new chair of the Public Transport Executive Group (PTEG), says: "Across our areas bus service quality is patchy, fares are racing ahead of inflation and lifeline services are being cut back month after month. If we are to stop these damaging trends we need similar powers to those that London's Mayor has used so successfully to properly specify and regulate services."

Pteg figures say fares have increased by 86% in PTE areas since deregulation while patronage has fallen by half.

Cllr Gary Clarke, chair of Centro-PTA, says: "We all want to see cleaner, more reliable bus services and, outside London, we are dependent on this being provided by the private sector. Recently we have had some positive meetings with the new boss (Denis Wormwell) at the region's biggest bus company TWM and I think we can look forward to a greater degree of customer focus as well as improved partnership working."

■ A copy of the report is available at: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa

New chief executive at Nat Ex

National Express Group has announced the successor to retiring chief executive Phil White. Richard Bowker, 40, ex chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, will take over the job in early September.

Phil White, also president of the CPT, announced his retirement when the group's preliminary results were released in March.

Commenting on Mr Bowker's appointment, National Express Group chairman David Ross said: "Today we are delighted to announce the appointment of Richard Bowker as chief executive of the Group. He is an outstanding individual with a great track record of leadership and achievement in both public and private sectors. I believe he is well placed to take the Group forward to the next stage of its growth. I look forward to working with Richard. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Phil on behalf of the Board for his commitment and contribution to the Group over the past ten years.'

Mr Bowker is a qualified chartered management accountant and started his business career at London Underground, specializing in procurement, commercial development and private finance initiative and public private partnerships and structures. Between December 2001 and September 2004, he was chair and chief executive of the Strategic Rail Authority. He was also formerly commercial director of Virgin Group and co-chairman of Virgin Rail. In August 2005 he was appointed chief executive of the Partnerships for Schools ('PfS'), a government body responsible for delivering the Building Schools for the Future investment programme.

Coincident with the announcement of its new chief executive the Group also released its trading statement which, it said, was in line with expectations. David Ross said: "Alsa is trading well and its integration into the Group is on schedule. Our train companies continue to take the lead in the latest rail punctuality league tables and we are focused on bidding for those train franchises where we are the incumbent operator. Our North American operations experienced a very good bid season and our UK bus and coach operations continued to perform well. Looking forward, we continue to monitor the cost of fuel and will mitigate its effect where practicable. The Board remains confident of the Group's future prospects.'

Richard Bowker: "Well placed to take the Group forward to the next stage of its growth"

At the Group's AGM which followed the announcements, the company reports that all resolutions were passed.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair poses for pictures on top of a Routemaster, the official England soccer squad bus, outside 10 Downing Street last week. The bus was autographed by British personalities and celebrities especially for an upcoming charity soccer match.

Moir's not saying

First Group says that comments made by Moir Lockwood about mergers in the bus industry were in reply to 'perennial' questions about industry consolidation, and not timed to coincide with the announcement of the new National Express chief executive.

Mr Lockhead was quoted in the *Aberdeen Express* as saying: "There's always the possibility we could merge with one of our rivals if the price is right."

Speculation at the time of Phil White's retirement announcement said that his leaving left the way open for First Group and National Express to merge. It was said that the personalities involved were the only barrier to a merger, and that chairman David Ross was all for a deal.

But First's director of group corporate communications Rachael Borthwick tells *CBW*: "He was making the point that it is the value of a deal that is the driver, it is not really anything to do with the personalities." The statement was in fact made when First Group announced its results, before the National Express announcement.

Quality bus investment urged

Councils should use new Government funding to create more statutory quality bus partnerships (SQBPs) in conjunction with operators, a public transport consultant urged last week. Paul Turner, Associate Director of the TAS Partnership, was speaking in London at a Centre for Transport Policy conference on 'Transport Innovation Fund: Next Steps'.

The Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) is a £2.5bn UK Department for Transport (DfT) initiative designed to help local authorities develop technologically-innovative approaches to demand management. These include congestion charging and including better public transport alternatives to car use

QBPs, said Turner, have achieved a lot. "But this has typically been in the form of 'quick wins' in good bus territory".

Authorities should now bid for TIF money to help them set up more SQBPs (only one is currently operational) to tackle the more difficult cases, and boost wider bus use. "Network-wide across the UK, bus speeds are slowing and the rate of installation of bus priority is not matching traffic growth. A one mph decrease in speed increases operating costs by one per cent.

"Voluntary QBPs are doing the right thing, but SQBPs will make this happen consistently and create greater public confidence. If local authorities show willing to do their bit radically to change generalised bus costs, the operators will respond in kind. Few of them are afraid of high-quality competition".

Seven local authority groups have already received TIF pump-priming funding to research new initiatives. A longer report on this event will appear in next week's issue.

Briefly

The United Nation's climate change chief says that government's around the world must do more to cut greenhouse gas emissions from transport. Richard Kinley, the officer-in-charge of the UN Climate Secretariat, said: "The growth is really quite worrisome. Clearly much more concerted action is necessary."

FirstGroup and Arriva could face each other for the first time in rival bids for an overseas rail franchise. Both have pre-qualified to bid for high-profile cross-border services linking Denmark and Sweden. The Oresund franchise bid, from the Isle of Zealand to mainland Sweden, also marks the first time FirstGroup has sought to operate rail services outside the UK.

A minibus driver elected as a Bradford BNP councillor in 2004 has lost his case for unfair dismissal, against Serco. Arthur Redfearn drove a special needs bus for the company, many of whose clients are from ethnic backgrounds. The company contended that he, or his vehicle, could be attacked, putting Serco's customers at risk. This was the third hearing of the case, the first two decisions were overturned on appeal.

It is not just coaches that will be charged for using Glasgow Airport. Car drivers will now be banned from picking up passengers outside the terminal building, and instead will have to pay £2 for 30 minutes in designated car parks. Currently, only 12% of passengers use public transport to get to Glasgow Airport.

One of the three councils along the route of the proposed west London tram scheme have withdrawn their support for the scheme, as predicted last week in CBW. The decision was carried unanimously by the London Borough of Ealing. Public consultation last year showed that 59% of people were opposed to the plan over fears of increased congestion.

COACHES

Get them off the road!

Impounding unsafe coaches will benefit us all, says traffic chief

Operators have been asked to lobby ministers to introduce impounding laws, and help a traffic chief drive unsafe buses and coaches off the road.

North East Traffic Commissioner Brigadier Tom Macartney told members of the Northern Region of the CPT last week he wanted to see similar regulations in force as those governing goods vehicles.

He said that if bus and coach bosses help him push transport ministers to introduce new rules it would protect the industry.

Mr Macartney said: "Impounding laws can only be used for goods vehicles and they have been very useful, as some of the worst goods vehicles have been removed from the road. This can have a positive affect on the industry."

He said that the majority of those vehicles impounded had been working in a dangerously unsafe condition and that he had seen some of them without road tax or MoT, with defective brakes, no insurance, and some were being driven by people without a driving licence.

Mr Macartney said: "If we look at the PCV industry there are dodgy operators in this area. Sadly, it doesn't affect PCV, yet some buses carry children on school contracts and are unsafe and unlicensed. That is why I would like you to help me push to get impounding through to ministers."

And he also asked members to give him intelligence on some of the 'dodgy' operators in the North East, which has more bus and coach operators than anywhere else in the country.

"I have the genuine impression there is a real problem up here and I have been asked to sort out some really dodgy people in the area that are in the industry. I need the information to stop these people operating," he said.

Mr Macartney added he was also concerned about the number of phoenix operators in the region and asked for intelligence from CPT members about them.

Rush Travel: an operator already closed down by commissioner

Expansion plans: AIRporter will be going places, promises Niall McKeever

Airporter up for expansion

Airporter, the Londonderry-based coach operator, is celebrating its tenth anniversary with the launch of several new routes.

From June 5 it will start phase two of its expansion plans, running direct services to and from City of Derry Airport, and two others to Strabane and Omagh and Limavady and Coleraine. It will also start its services to and from Belfast International Airport earlier, and finish them later.

The changes have meant a near doubling of its Esker-only fleet to 13 vehicles, split between 33-seat Riadas and 41-seat Tourings, and the recruitment of 15 more staff.

The regulated market in Northern Ireland makes operating licences very difficult to obtain. But Airporter has overcome this by providing a service that complements Translink rather than competes against it, and working closely with airports in the region.

"This is two companies working together, with public transport being the winner at the end of the day" director Niall McKeever tells CBW.

Phase three of the company's plans will be to open up more routes to the south, including cross-border services. Before that, the company will roll out a sophisticated internet booking system, working with Mobimatics, the same supplier who works with Wrights on the StreetCar. All vehicles will be fitted with a barcode reader to scan e-tickets.

The Airporter concept comes from America, with the emphasis on the porter in the company name. Drivers provide a comprehensive service, carrying luggage for passengers from the Airporter stands directly outside the entrance at the three airports it serves. This is a valuable marketing tool in itself says Mr McKeever: "Customers cannot miss our vehicles because you have to fall over them to get into the airport. It generates an organic feel, and means we don't have to tout round all the little towns in the area. Our service will be familiar to anybody using airports in Northern Ireland."

Protours buys up Viking

Isle of Man operator Protours has bought Viking Tours of Swadlincote, Derbyshire, for an undisclosed amount. The company now has three UK bases, in addition to other coach businesses in South Africa and Namibia, and a total fleet of 60 vehicles.

Viking Tours has a turnover of £1m-plus, operating local, national, and European routes and a number of contracts with a fleet of 20 vehicles.

Protours managing director Dawie Wilson told *CBW*: "We saw a great synergy between ourselves and Viking Tours. Our core business is supplying coaches for luxury travel and the addition of this Derbyshire-based company to our existing bases in Heswall, Wirral, and the Isle of Man is strategically important. It gives us a good base from which to grow in England."

The deal was put together by HW Corporate Finance, who found the buyer for the shareholders of Viking Tours, whose main business is the holiday company Travelstyle Tours of Chesterfield. Protours was established in 1990 in Nelspruit, South Africa, initially with two coaches

Now Maldon TREBLES its coach parking fees

Coaches parking in Maldon are faced with a massive 300% hike in parking charges.

In the same breath as it announced a free day's parking in the Essex seaside trown, the council has doubled the two-hourly parking charge from £5 to £10 and trebled the daily charge from £10 to £30.

The unannounced change – which is certain to hit excursions – was immediately condemned by the Coach Tourism Council, which said it sends out similar signals to the Isle of Wight situation (see pages 25 to 28).

"The CTC deplores this sudden and massive price hike," said chief executive Chris Wales. "On the Isle of Wight, the council narrowly avoided a coach tourism boycott of the island. We will be talking to our members about our next course of action."

Bizarrely, Maldon District Council chose the same week to announce a 'celebration' of the redevelopment of Promenade Park, giving away a day's coach parking from June to August. The announcement made no mention of the huge parking price increases.

"Once again, the industry is faced with a sudden price hike," said the editor of *CBW*, Mark Williams. "It seems that Maldon is under the impression that coach drivers have an unlimited supply of cash, and that operators can simply absorb these increases in the holiday price."

The spokesman at Maldon District Council was unavailable for comment . He was on holiday.

Maldon: Another scandalous parking price hike angers operators

Driver fined for being an hour over

A coach driver has been fined £100 with £50 costs after being one hour 18 minutes short of his rest period between two jobs.

John Hutton of Knowle, Bristol, had driven from Germany to Bristol in his coach while employed by Eastville Coaches of Bristol, Solihull Magistrates Court was told.

The next day he drove passengers in the coach from Bristol to an exhibition at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, said Mr Lee Trubshaw, prosecuting for the Vehicle & Operator Services Agency.

"Mr Hutton should have had nine hours rest between the two jobs in a 24-hour period," said Mr Trubshaw. "But a check on the coach's tachograph at the NEC in Birmingham revealed he had been 1 hour 18 minutes short of the regulation rest period.

"Coach drivers must take the regulation rest period by law to prevent fatigue and possible accidents," he said.

Hutton admitted exceeding his driving time and failing to have sufficient rest in a 24-hour period. Magistrates said Hutton's fine had been reduced to £100 because he had admitted both offences.

■ Charges of not using a tachograph sheet were made against Duncan and Jacqueline Pratt, trading as Jackie's Coaches of Waterdale Close, Hardwicke, Gloucester, at the same court. The case was adjourned to a date yet to be fixed.

Briefly

■ Dalescrest Travel in Kirkby Lonsdale collected the National Agent Achievement Award for Best Coach Travel Company at an event in London last week. "We are delighted to receive such a fantastic award," says owner Alan Armstrong. "We were up against some very large coach companies across the country and to win the award is wonderful."

■ London-based Davian Coaches have bought a full communications system from T-Mobile, and ended up being featured as a case study in marketing material for the German technology giant. The family-run company has expanded considerably in recent years, having been founded in 1971, and now runs a fleet of 10 large coaches and 15 minibuses.

■ Swans Travel in Oldham has taken on its first National Express service. It will run the 060 Liverpool Leeds diagram from June 26 using two new Caetano Levante front-access coaches. The service was previously operated by First Group.

■ The DfT is consulting on draft regulations for new heavy duty vehicles, and revisions to the requirements relating to end-of-series vehicles. Changes would see amendments to Construction & Use rules covering the implementation of Euro IV requirements for engines to sustain their designated low emission rating over their working life, and govern the fitting of on-board diagnostics systems to monitor emissions.

Responses are sought by August 10. Full details on the DfT's website: www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_control/documents/userinformation/dft_whats_new_page.hcsp

■ The driver charged over the death of a 17 year old passenger in Devon in January has made his second appearance in court. Robert Botur, 35, was bailed but committed to appear at Exeter Crown Court this week.

used on commuter services. The company then moved into the tourist market and relocated its offices to Johannesburg. It is now represented throughout South Africa.

The company expanded into the UK in August 2003, establishing Protours IoM. It currently runs numerous tours in South Africa for overseas tourists - mainly from agents such as Thompsons Tours.

Rebel group's first meeting

Kent operators have been invited to the inaugural meeting of the newly-formed Kent Bus & Coach Operators' Group.

On June 22, they will be meeting at the offices of insurance brokers Belmont International to agree the constitution of the new group, formed after the publicised dispute between Kent County Council and its contracted operators.

Officers of the group are: chairman, Norman Kemp, of Nu Venture; treasurer, Clive Eglinton, of Chalkwell; and secretary Eric Baldock, of Autocar.

The committee includes Kevin Hawkins of Arriva in Maidstone; Roy Gould of Marshopper; and Roland Eglinton, of Chalkwell.

Contact Eric Baldock at eric.baldock@btinternet.com for details, or arrive at Belmont International, Becket House, Vestry House, Otford, in Sevenoaks, at 19.30hrs on June 22.

SCHOOLS

Briefly

Metro's My Bus school service has won the Working Together Award at the national Public Servants of the Year Awards 2006. My Bus was singled out for its "unique partnership approach" which involves children, parents, teachers, local education authorities and regional government. Nearly 3,000 schools use the service.

Angus Council in Scotland has reversed its decision not to allow a mother to board the school bus in the morning to ensure her children are strapped in.

Councillors in Renfrewshire last week issued an ultimatum to parents over its school services. Discretionary free travel was withdrawn last month; instead parents were asked to pay £1-a-day return fares. The decision sparked bitter protests outside council offices. Parents were told last week that unless they registered their children by Thursday May 25 then their children would not be allowed to use the service.

Parents and opposition councillors in Lancashire are also protesting over council plans to withdraw discretionary free transport to faith schools. Preston Council has formally recorded its opposition to the cuts. Parents and children carrying placards calling for the reinstatement of the bus services held a demonstration last week.

Parents in Hertfordshire have been told that it will cost up to £552 per child per year to transport their children to school if free faith school transport is withdrawn. A packed public meeting saw emotions running high, with parents saying poor families will not be able to give their children a religious education. *CBW* will have a full national round-up of faith school transport next week.

Council slammed on Section 19

North eastern traffic commissioner questions Durham Council's controversial 'educational' hire policy

A council has been criticised by a traffic commissioner and operators for hiring out school buses with only Section 19 licences.

Durham County Council claims it is only using the three vehicles for its own 'education establishments for educational purposes'.

But operators say that as they only have Section 19 powers they should not be hired out for profit in any way. They say the £120 a day charge is pricing coach and bus firms out of the market. And the licence means the buses do not need tachographs or as many regular checks as PCV vehicles.

North East Traffic Commissioner Tom Macartney said during last week's Northern Region CPT meeting that he would be concerned if Section 19 powers were being used to hire out vehicles.

He told members: "Section 19 came about to allow Scouts and Cubs and the like to have their own transport for their own travel. If someone branches out for hire and reward it is wrong."

The council admitted they were hiring out vehicles in a letter to an operator after he asked for the details of costs of a council-run school bus pilot scheme. In the letter the council says: "The vehicles are only hired to local Durham County Council education establishments for educational purposes. The charge out rate is £65 for a half day and £120 per full day and this is on the basis of working between 09.00 and 15.00 to be available for the home to school element each day."

Operators say that as the vehicles - part of the council's social care and health fleet - are being hired, the council is breaching Section 19 regulations. The DFT states that "a permit bus cannot be used with a view to profit nor incidentally to an activity which is itself carried on with a view to profit".

One operator said: "The costs that were worked out for the pilot were only for school runs. This activity was not mentioned, so the money they make is profit. If they want a full licence they should apply for one."

But a Durham County Council spokesman denied the claims. He said: "We are operating the three yellow school buses quite properly and are hiring them out to our own schools for educational purposes, using a full Section 19 licence.

"They are not available for hire by the general public. We have held private and open meetings with the CPT where this matter has been fully discussed."

A spokesman from the CPT said: "This matter has been brought to our attention by members and we shall be looking at the wider use of Section 19 powers nationally."

Macartney: concerned by council's actions

"Check operator is licensed" department urges

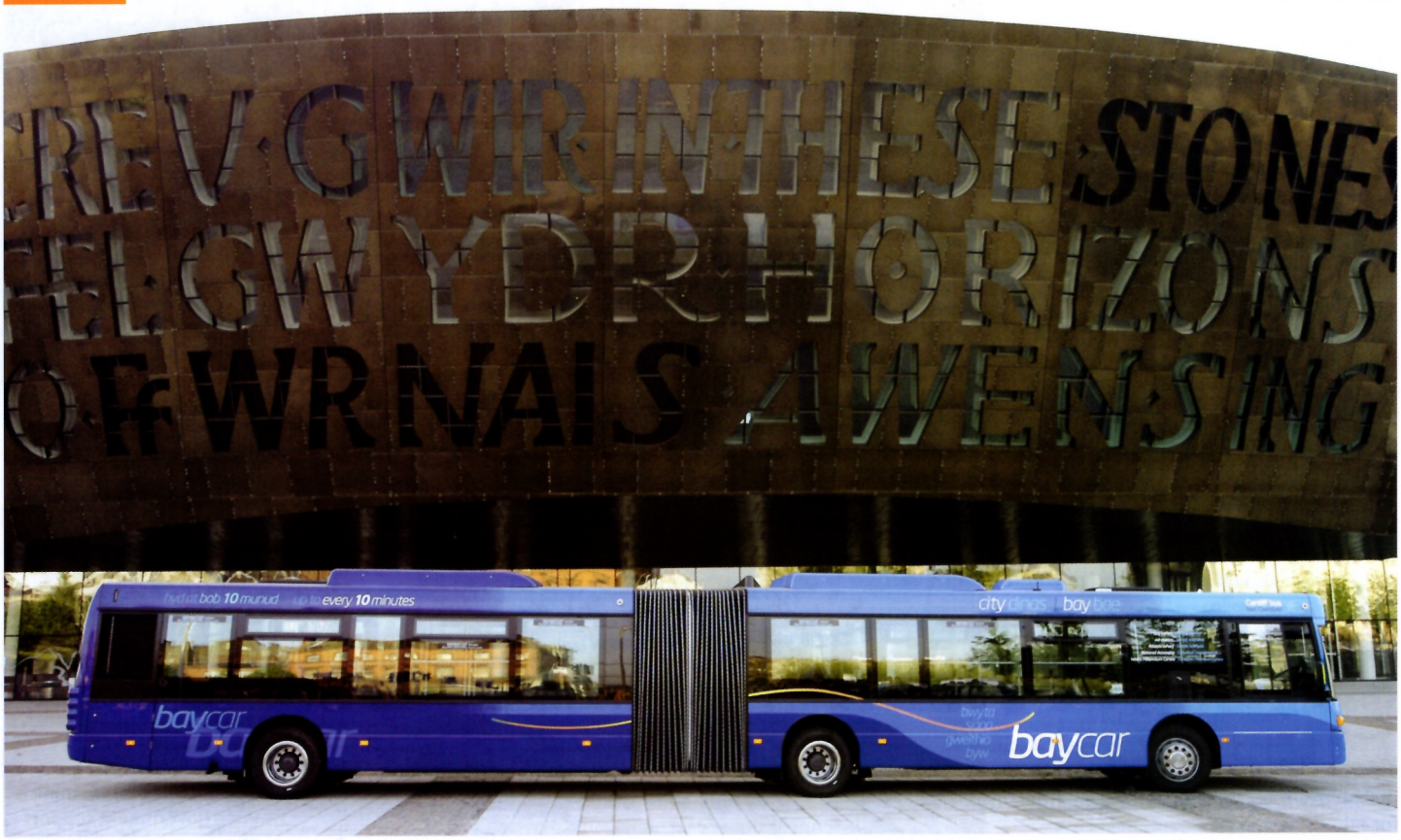
The Irish Government's Department of Transport has issued advice to parents, schools and members of the public to check the licensing status of operators and vehicles that they engage for private school transport or other forms of private hire. The move follows the school bus accident in Co Offaly in March which involved a vehicled which was not properly licensed.

"Persons engaging a bus operator should request from them sight of the Road Passenger Transport Operators Licence, first to ensure that the operator holds a licence, and secondly that any vehicles used on any service are authorised on that licence," the DoT advice notice states.

The Department has made available on its website *www.transport.ie* a full list of just under 2,800 licensed PSV operators in the republic.

"These licences do not authorise specific routes or services, but confirm that the operator was deemed to be professionally competent, of good repute and sound financial standing at the time of issue of the licence," the DoT explains.

A confidential hotline number 1800 202 735 has been set up for members of the public who wish to make any complaints in regard to PSV operators.



The most highly specced buses in the world?

Cardiff Bus's new Scania artics are fitted with a list of extras almost as long as the vehicles themselves. In fact the company is wondering whether it has just taken delivery of the most highly-specified new buses in the world.

The company's £4.5m investment works out at just short of £240,00 for each of its 19 new Scania Omnilink bendy buses, for use on two high-profile routes in the Welsh capital. One of the routes, which takes 13 vehicles, will form the basis of the first Welsh Statutory Quality Bus Partnership, with infrastructure changes provided by Cardiff County Council, and funding from the Welsh Assembly Government.

Welsh First Minister Rhodri Morgan said: "The Welsh Assembly Government wants a world-class 21st-century transport system providing modern, affordable and environmentally-friendly travel for everyone. This exciting new fleet of buses fits the bill perfectly."

Starting from the front, the vehicles are fitted with: the latest specification LED Vultron destination blinds, front, side and rear; compressed air-activated driver protection screen; full air conditioning; Wayfarer TGX ticket machines (from Summer 2006); fully Smartcard-enabled (implementation Winter 2006); Digibox passenger announcement system; next bus stop display; Esteban seating; radio system providing two-way contact with inspectors and control centre.

There are 12 CCTV cameras, including six external, with footage transferred electronically to company computers upon return to the depot. Live CCTV footage is regularly displayed on the on-board monitors by way of a reminder to passengers. The screens can also display service and information messages on a time sequence basis. At all other times, live BBC News 24 will be broadcast, via a newly-developed Autosound system accessing digital Freeview.

This is the comfort level that Cardiff Bus believes will encourage people out of their cars

Black box technology transmits live engine performance data constantly by live satellite link to the control room, while GPS satellite tracking is linked to the control centre for reliability management, and to the city centre RTPI (Real Time Passenger Information) system.

Cllr Steve Pantak, chair of Cardiff Bus, said: "People keep telling us they will only move to public transport when we are offering a credible alternative to the private car. By the end of 2007 we will have one of the most modern fleets in the country, and this investment demonstrates the quality that can be achieved if public transport is given the priority traffic management measures it needs to operate a reliable and frequent service."

The buses are currently branded 'capital city red', designed by Best Impressions. The four vehicles operating around Cardiff Bay are branded 'baycar' (the remaining two are branded in the generic Cardiff Bus livery and will be used as spares). The company says it will explore the concept of corridor branded vehicles as the improvements envisaged within the local and regional bus strategies become a reality.

To promote the service for the first week of operation, from May 28 to June 4 inclusive, half term week, all journeys on the 'baycar' service will be entirely free of charge.

BUSES

Get your facts right!

TfL says Lib Dems got their fare evasion sums wrong

Transport for London has refuted an attack by a member of the London Assembly on the levels of fare evasion on the capital's bendy buses.

It says that, far from being out of control as the member claims, evasion rates are actually decreasing, and are comparable with, or better than, other large transport operators.

Geoff Pope, the Liberal Democrat chairman of the Transport Committee in the London Assembly, says: "Fare evasion figures are stretching out of control. TfL should step up revenue enforcement now. Passengers need to see squads of ticket inspectors sorting out bendy buses - we need shock and awe tactics. Above all, these tactics need plenty of publicity so people really understand that if they cheat they get caught."

"Cracking down on fare evasion could crack down on fare rises. It's time to scotch the bendy bus myth that they offer a free ride once and for all."

The Liberal Democrats tabled a mayoral question asking about the estimated revenue losses on London buses. They were told that bendy buses are thought to lose £1.9m a year, and conventional buses £28m. From figures published in October last year on the size of the London bus fleet (5000 deckers, 2700 single decks and 300 bendy buses) they deduced that revenue losses per bendy bus are £6,333 per year, as against £3,636 per conventional bus. But *CBW* reports this week (see Regional News) that the 390th Citaro bendy bus has just been delivered to Arriva London, although precise figures for how many of these are in service are not available. (Using the 390 figure reduces the revenue loss per bendy to £4,871).

A TfL spokesman told *CBW*: "Their figures are wrong, basically. Some back-of-a-fag packet calculations have been done. The straight answer is that what we know, and what everybody knew, is that an open boarding service is going to have a slightly higher proportion of fare evasion than normal on-bus operated services."

"The issue here though, if you are looking at the Liberal Democrat press release which talks about evasion stretching out of control, is that is completely wrong. In fact the trend on fare evasion in London is downwards. The overall network average is between 3-3.4% depending on the way you measure it across the fleet, which certainly compares very favourably indeed with other major transport networks."

TfL attribute decreasing evasion levels to better enforcement. About 1,000 people a month are prosecuted, and it says 99% of those prosecutions are successful, resulting in fines of £100-400, and around 50,000 passengers per year pay penalty fares of £20. Revenue protection staff, currently numbering 250 - checking 1m fares a month - will rise to 330 by this time next year. It says that child concessionary schemes have also reduced the possibility for people to under pay, and over-riding has been eliminated since the zone system was abolished.

Bendy Bus fare evasion compares favourably

Coventry: Bendy bus followed by BRT?

Coventry plan takes shape

Centro-PTA is co-ordinating plans for a £70m Bus Rapid Transit system linking Nuneaton and Kenilworth via Coventry city centre. The route could be up and running by 2011 if the government agrees to fund it. Warwickshire County Council, Coventry City Council and Centro-PTA are working together on the project. Public consultation starts in June.

"The idea of bus rapid transit is an exciting prospect and one that we think is capable of winning government support and funding," says Centro-PTA chairman Gary Clarke. "We are ready to move forward on a range of options and we need people's views to make sure that any chosen scheme will be well supported."

The BRT plan supercedes an earlier light rail proposal using existing railway tracks, although Coventry councillor David Arrowsmith says lobbying government for backing for a rail-based scheme should still continue.

Xmas message a huge success

After patronage leapt 26% following a Christmas campaign in Manchester, Stagecoach has employed the same agency on another advertising campaign, for use nationwide.

The 'If you're 60-plus, it's free by bus' campaign - devised to promote concessionary travel - is the work of Manchester agency, Studio North.

Allie Johns, marketing manager at Stagecoach in Manchester, says: "We have worked on a number of campaigns and this one was particularly challenging as we needed a solution that could be localised for each of our areas. Managers love the fact they can access the microsite to select different creative to meet the local need. I hope we see as much success with this campaign as our Manchester Christmas one, which saw bus travel increase by 26%."

Auto speed limiters should cut road casualties

TfL has also revealed that it is investigating an Intelligent Speed Adapation (ISA) system that will automatically limit speed in restricted areas.

Aimed at public vehicles like buses and taxis, TfL says the motivation behind the system is road safety. It has already achieved its target of reducing casualties by 40% compared with 1994-98 figures and has now been set a 50% target by the Mayor.

The system could either advise drivers they are entering a new speed limit zone, or force the vehicle to slow down to the limit. "We are looking at the potential benefits that might be drawn from fitting interruptive intelligent speed adaptors into vehicles in fleets in which we have influence," a TfL spokesman told *CBW*. "The issue is here is about preventing road accidents."

He went on to explain that controlling the speed of a certain number of vehicles on the road would affect the prevailing speed on roads and have an overall calming affect, so that fitting the system to every vehicle on the road would not be neccessary.

The system would work through GPS receivers that could detect limits through fixed points on the road.

Although TfL says the implementation of ISA is someway off, Ordnance Survey is already working on the digital speed limit map of Greater London the system would use. A small scale trial of less than ten vehicles is expected to start sometime next year.

The bus war on route 92 in Manchester between Stagecoach and local operator GM Buses rages on, and continues to attract high-profile attention.
Last month, traffic commissioner Beverley Bell said she was keeping a close eye on the situation (see *CBW* 725), and last week environmentalist Lord Terry Thomas of Macclesfield called on government to give more control over bus services to GMPTE to prevent unnecessary pollution caused by queuing vehicles in situations like the one pictured above.
Lord Thomas has written to the Department of the Environment, the Dti and the DfT expressing his concern over the situation. He says: "The crowded 192 bus route is resulting in increased air pollution and congestion which is beyond the powers of GMPTE to control."
"For over 20 years, what is now Transport for London has been able to set frequencies, fares and standards, including current criteria that requires operators to run vehicles with Euro II engines or better, and to fit particulate traps. The same should also be available to GMPTE as well as other passenger transport executives."
A GMPTE spokesman says: "We share Lord Thomas's concerns about the environmental impact the number of buses operating along the A6 corridor between Manchester city centre and Hazel Grove is having. In addition, there is no denying the impact this congestion has on other road users.
"It is our understanding that Manchester City Council is in the process of applying to the traffic commissioner for a Traffic Regulation Condition in a bid to bring some order. This would enable the commissioner to remove the operating licence of any bus company it finds breeching the terms set out in the TRC."

Briefly

The two-day strike at Wilts and Dorset bus company, scheduled for May 25-26, was postponed after management reportedly tabled a better offer. Talks are being held with the RMT union this week. 700 workers staged a one day walk-out in mid-May.

Southwark Coroner's Court recorded a verdict of accidental death in the case of Michael Hallinen, the bus driver killed last year when a bendy bus rolled into him. The court heard that a colleague stopped to help him fix his rear brake lights but that somehow the 'haltbrake' system on the other vehicle, designed to stop the bus moving when the doors are open, malfunctioned and the vehicle rolled forward.

Leicestershire County Council has bowed to public pressure and promised to fund a countywide concessionary travel scheme, at an extra cost of £300,000. It follows the case of a disabled pensioner forced to get off a bus at the city border because the bus driver could not allow her to make up the difference in the fare.

One in 10 people – or nearly 6m Britons – have met the love of their life at a bus stop, according to research from bus stop manufacturer Trueform. Just over 3%, or 2m people, say they have split from a partner at a bus stop, had a fight, or decided to get a new job. The research did not say how many use stops as toilets.

A London bus driver has been cleared of blame over the death of an elderly woman killed while crossing the road last December. Eyewitnesses told Hornsey Coroner's Court that the woman did not check the road before crossing, and that the driver, Joao DaSilva, had not been speeding. Police said the junction – at Monument Way and High Road, Tottenham – was "rather complicated".

Dew's new 'topper heads off York environment concerns

York's sightseeing tour specialist Top Line Travel has launched its first low-floor, wheelchair-accessible double decker, as a gesture of commitment to both the city and its tourists, in view of environmental concerns. Top Line had planned to buy two new open toppers next year (*CBW* February 16), but the availability of a seven-year-old second-hand bus, prompted a swift change of policy.

"After six years building up the business, we felt it was time to go upmarket," said managing director Peter Dew. "We were very worried about the City introducing a low emission zone, but that doesn't seem as immediate now, and it gives us time to plan new investment."

The 70-seat East Lancs-bodied Dennis Trident, formerly operated by Metrobus of Orpington, was supplied by Ventura Bus and converted by North West Bus & Coach repairs at a total cost of around £80k. The conversion to half-open top involved removing the central entrance and half of the roof, strengthening the floor and installing drainage channels, a manual ramp, public address and CCTV equipment, and reupholstering the seats in City Sightseeing vinyl for upstairs and moquette downstairs.

Unusually, the wheelchair anchorage is forward-facing, as Peter Dew said that there was already a steady demand for the facility, and folding wheelchairs were already being carried on other buses. Mr Dew said that the choice of a half decker was dictated more by passengers wanting to keep out of the sun, than as the traditional compromise for the English weather.

Above: Half open top is a move upmarket
Left: Top Line Travel directors Sue and Peter Dew with Richard Adams, sales manager of Ventura Bus and Coach Sales

The vehicle was purchased from a finance company, after the Go-Ahead Group chose not to purchase the vehicle to cascade within its operations. Top Line has replaced the oldest Leyland Atlantean in its ten-vehicle fleet, which has been exported to Holland.

Martha of the lakes

Britain's only scheduled steam bus entered service last Wednesday in the Lake District, the result of a four-year effort by a father and son team which involved a change in the law as well as the restoration of the 74-year-old vehicle.

The steam bus will run between the tourist information centre in Bowness and the Windermere Steamboat Museum every Saturday, Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday until October 29, operated by Stuart and Chris Harrison, of Broughton-in-Furness, Cumbria.

Stuart said: "Martha is the only steam bus in the UK, and possibly the world, that runs to a scheduled service. She is named after Chris's grandmother, who sadly died the same week we brought the bus to Cumbria in 2002.

"Getting the bus ready for public service needed a lot of time, devotion and effort, but it has all been worth it - and six jobs have been created."

The 32-seater bus uses 50kg of coal and 50 gallons of water every ten miles and is officially registered with the Traffic Commissioner.

Gaining registration required a special Act of Parliament to amend public service vehicle exhaust regulations, sponsored and paid for by the DfT, although the Harrison's paid for a tilt test themselves, carried out by Optare in Leeds.

Rebuilding the dilapidated bus, which arrived in Cumbria minus its coachwork, was a major challenge as no design drawings remained, just some old photographs.

The restoration work was carried out by the Appleby Heritage Centre, near Penrith, with the aid of a £16,000 grant from DEFRA's Rural Development Service.

Stuart added: "I'm thankful to all the people and organisations who have supported this venture. I'm also grateful to our chief engineer, Ian Page, of CSM Engineering at Haverigg, who has the job of keeping Martha on the road after 74 years, and to the Windermere Steamboat Museum where she is based during the summer."

Full steam ahead for Martha – after four years of hard work

Agreement in Bath

The public inquiry into the Traffic Regulation Conditions requested by Bath City Council to govern open top services in the city adjourned early after it emerged the parties are now largely in agreement.

Bath Council will press ahead with its TRC though, it says, to regulate potential future entrants to the market.

The council asked the traffic commissioner to consider five conditions, covering emissions, the use of loud speakers, a limit on the number of vehicles each operator can use and the total allowed in the city, stops and routes. But the Bath Bus Company's brand-new fleet – it is now the only open top operator in the city – already complies with the first two conditions, and the two have reached agreement on the number of vehicles to be operated (a maximum of ten, with duplicates allowed).

Martin Curtis, managing director of the Bath Bus Company, says the two remaining points are relatively minor, and concern stops that have been removed from beside major attractions, and changes to one route.

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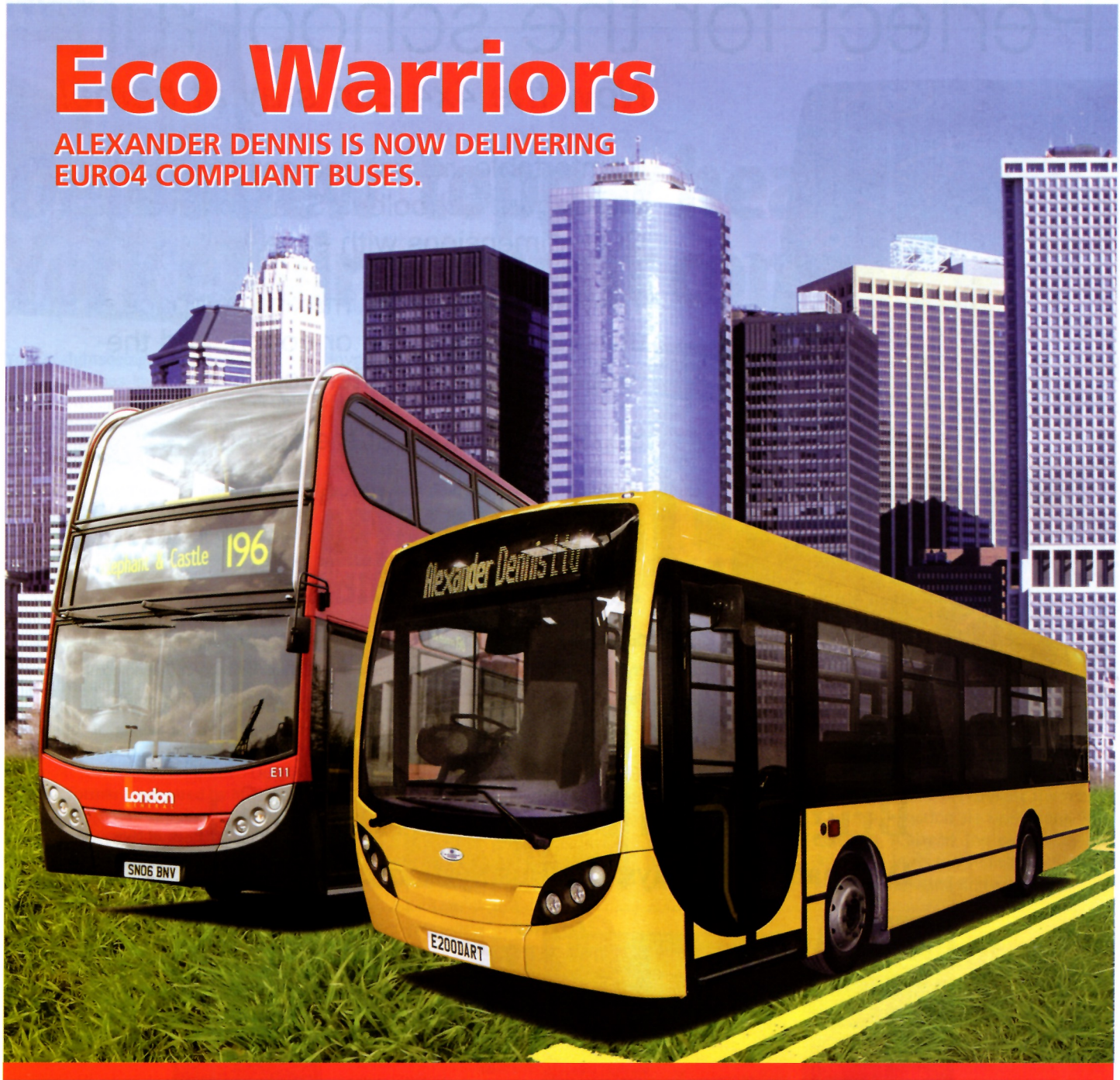

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Berlin gives CNG buses another run

Bill Godwin

After abandoning EU-funded trials of CNG-fuelled buses in 1998, because of a number of perceived operational factors including the vehicles' inadequate range before refuelling, the Berlin transport authority BVG has introduced five new MAN gas buses in time for the football World Cup.

The new single-deckers are being leased from GASAG, the city's gas supplier, and are part of the alternative fuel policy now again being actively promoted in the German capital. To achieve very high standards of air quality, with almost zero particulates and very low NOx, it is proposed to add biomethane to the gas being piped to the 12 GASAG fuelling points in the city, including the purpose-built facility at the bus depot. Other CNG-fuelled buses in Berlin already include 10 vehicles in use by an independent contractor (HARU) to BVG. Alternative bus technologies currently trialled in Berlin include hydrogen-fuelled engines and hybrid-drive vehicles.

In the light of the admixture of Biomethane to the CNG used in the current Berlin project, it is pertinent to refer to the recent decision by Berne, Switzerland, to replace a number of old diesel buses with 32 new Volvo 7700 articulated buses which will run on Biogas (methane) produced from sewage sludge. Gas fuel in the Berne scheme, which is likely to be extended to the entire bus fleet, will contain 96% methane.

The first ethanol buses outside of Sweden will start operating in Italy in September. ATC of La Spezia will trial three Scania Omnilink ethanol buses as part of the BEST (BioEthanol for Sustainable Transport) project, initiated by Stockholm operator SL, and partly financed by the EU. The aim is to pave the way for acceptance of ethanol as a viable alternative fuel. "Ethanol is an excellent renewable fuel for heavy commercial vehicles in urban operation," said Bengt Rasmusen, MD of Scania Bus Italy. "We regard this project as an important first step towards sustainable urban transport with renewable fuels. The environmental potential is great and Scania is using a proven technology that is fully up to the demands of tough urban operation." ATC has a 250 strong bus fleet, transporting around 18 million passengers per year. The other locations involved in BEST are Rotterdam, Dublin, Madrid, Basque Provinces (Spain), Nanyang (China) and Sao Paulo (Brazil).

118 Volvo buses ordered for Colombia

Volvo Buses has received an order for 118 articulated buses for one of the world's largest bus rapid transit systems, in Bogota, Colombia. They will join 432 Volvo buses already operating in Colombia, and take Volvo's market share of articulated buses to over 50%.

Bogota's system, the Transmilenio, is a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system where buses operate in separate lanes on a number of corridors through the city.

Phase III of the Transmilenio system is now under construction - hence the additional vehicle requirement. They are Volvo B12MA and will be run by three local operators - Conexión Móvil, Express del Futuro and Metrobus. The buses are equipped with Volvo's mid-mounted, 12-litre, 340bhp Euro 3 D12D engine.

Chassis are being sent in kit form from the Volvo Buses plant in Curitiba, Brazil and assembled by Colombian importer GM Colmotores. Bodies are being built by two coach manufacturers in Colombia, Superpolo and Busscar.

Bogota's BRT system will soon operate 550 Volvo artics

Briefly

Mercedes-Benz fuel cell vehicles have in total covered more than two million kilometers. The first fuel cell vehicles were put into operation in May 2003, successively followed by the delivery of Citaro buses and Sprinters for use by customers in Europe, the United States, Japan, Australia and China. The bus fleet with its 36 vehicles worldwide has clocked up 1.25 million kilometers and close to 86,000 operating hours, while the fuel cell Sprinters have now completed 58,000 kilometers and almost 2,200 operating hours.

The driver of the Belgian bus that crashed killing seven people last weekend has denied falling asleep at the wheel. He says the crash was caused by a tyre blowout. Twenty-three people were injured after the coach hit a tree and overturned in the Spanish Pyrenees.

The New Zealand competition authorities are objecting to a merger between Wellington's two largest operators, New Zealand Bus and Mana Coach Services. New Zealand bus is the re-branded ex-Stagecoach operation, sold last November. Combined, the companies have a 90% market share.

An eight-year-old New York boy has been charged with criminally negligent homicide after a young girl was killed by a school bus. He reportedly gained entrance to the empty, parked bus through the emergency door and let the handbrake off. The bus rolled forwards and crushed the girl as she was crossing the road.

Chinese city Shenzhen will start building the first of five BRT routes by the end of this year. The system will use 40 Euro III 18m vehicles in total, and is planned to be fully operational by 2010.

Regional News

CBW takes a look at the big issues where you live in our round-up of the regions. If you've got a local issue you would like us to cover, contact Andrew Peace at *andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk*

SCOTLAND

The company building all four new bus stations in Fife, Scotland, has gone into administration, though a bond posted with the local council will ensure the work is completed. Lancashire-based **Dew Pitchmastic** was appointed contractor to build the new stations in St Andrews, Leven, Glenrothes and Kirkaldy two years ago by the Scottish Executive. The entire project was projected to cost £4m and be finished by this summer.

The St Andrews station is near completion but there are doubts it can be finished before the start of the summer tourist season.

In what is believed to be a first in Scotland, traffic wardens in **Edinburgh** will travel on local buses to enforce bus lane restrictions. Edinburgh's 'Greenlanes' are reserved for buses, taxis and cyclists during rush hour. Cllr Andrew Burns, council transport leader says: "This should make rush hour traffic flow more smoothly. Bus lanes have been a phenomenal success but they need to be enforced consistently to be fully effective."

REP. IRELAND

Bus Éirann will appoint outside contractors to inspect the seatbelts on school buses following the tragedies of recent weeks. The contract initially covers 2,000 vehicles, but will include the remaining 300 at a later date, and will last for four years. The contractor will visually inspect the condition of seatbelts in large coaches and minibuses throughout Ireland and produce a written report on each vehicle. The work will start at the 'earliest opportunity'. Last week, Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern told the parliament that Bus Éirann's fleet should be inspected independently.

WALES

The free fare week on select bus services in **Ceredigion**, Wales, has been hailed a huge success after patronage rose by up to 44%.

The 'Get 2 Work 4 Free Week' in April saw free travel on buses from Aberystwyth to Carmarthen and Cardigan. The two Cardigan buses saw passenger numbers jump by 41% and 44%, while the numbers on the Carmarthen bus rose by 21%.

Local MP Mark Williams was quoted as saying: "This scheme has encouraged more people to use public transport and will have therefore meant a reduction in traffic on our roads. This will have contributed to a saving for our environment which I greatly welcome. The challenge now is to turn this one-week trial into a permanent fixture."

NORTH

A First bus driver in **Rotherham** died last week after apparently suffering a heart attack while at the wheel.

There was only one passenger on the bus. She was treated for 'severe' shock and a minor injury after the bus demolished a 7ft garden wall and crashed into a large tree.

Allen Williams, 54, had been with First for just over a year, having started in April 2005.

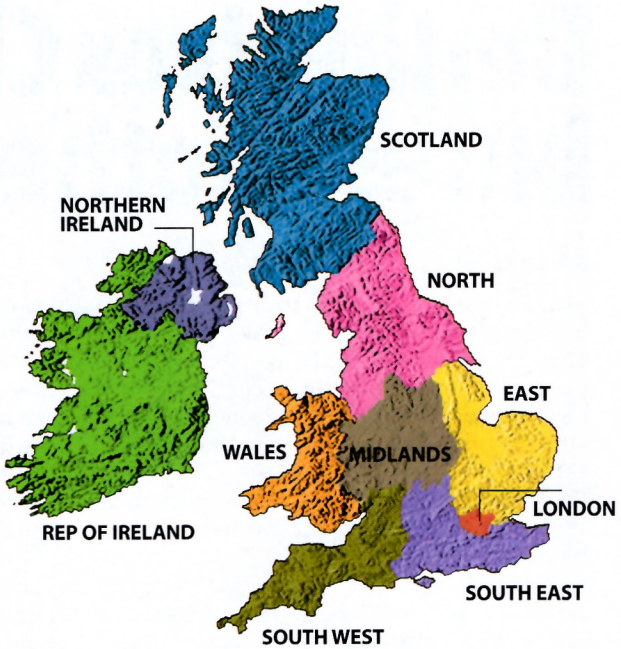
The accident occurred at approximately 06.45 hrs on the A618 Pleasley Road, Whiston, and involved a First service 24 single decker, travelling from Rotherham towards Swallownest.

First says its local Accident Investigation Team is working with South Yorkshire Police. An inquest in to his death is due to be opened at Rotherham Coroner's Court at 11.30 on Thursday May 25, 2006.

With up to 5,000 motorists a day flouting bus lane restrictions, **Sheffield City Council** is now seeking cabinet approval to enforce the lanes using CCTV cameras.

The government granted local authorities the power to enforce bus lanes last November.

"It is vital that we start enforcing our bus lanes as the levels of abuse are leading to significant delays to thousands of people who travel on the city's roads each day," says Cllr Terry Fox, council spokesman on Transport. "In the case of Hillsborough, we know that around 5,000 vehicles per day are abusing the current restrictions.



When we first introduced the bus/tram gates, most drivers complied with the restrictions, but, because there is little threat of enforcement, abuse has escalated to the levels we see today."

Fines would be levied at £60. The scheme will be launched at the Hillsborough bus gates in the autumn, if the cabinet approve the plan, and extended to other parts of the city if successful.

LONDON

Arriva's chief executive David Martin, **Arriva London** managing director Mark Yexley, Wolfgang Presinger, executive managing director of Mercedes Benz Buses and Coaches and Oliver Moeckesch, managing director of Evobus UK were all present as London's Transport Commissioner Peter Hendy officially opened Arriva's

Arriva's revamped Edmonton garage was officially opened by Peter Hendy last week. It's home to over 30 bendy buses, 300 bus drivers and 134 buses

Briefly

Four passengers were injured when their First bus was involved in a collision with a van in Bolton town centre last week. One of the passengers was taken to hospital with a head injury after being thrown to the floor by the force of the crash. Her condition was described as 'serious but stable'. The other three passengers were treated for minor injuries. The bus driver was described as 'shaken but unhurt'.

Two black teenagers on a bus in Leicester were stabbed by a white man after he shouted racist abuse at them. Both boys were stabbed in the chest. They were released from hospital the same day. The attacker is still at large.

Briefly

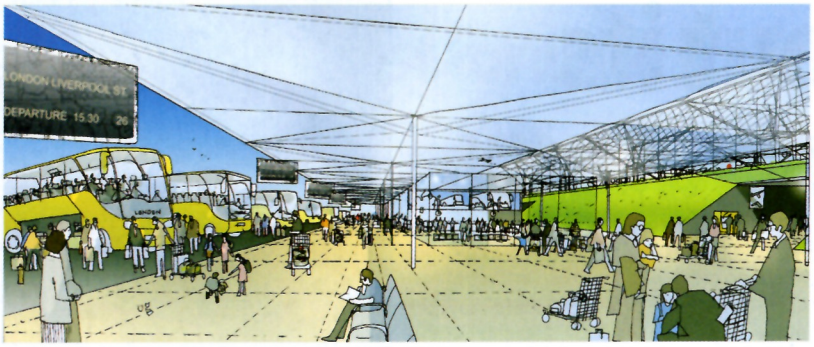
A young man produced a gun and aimed it at passengers while travelling on the 57 First bus in Glasgow. He disembarked without further incident, leaving passengers 'badly shaken'.

An elderly woman was run over and killed by a bus in Ibrox, Glasgow, mid-morning Monday while crossing the road. She was taken to hospital but died later. The driver and passengers were unhurt.

A bus shelter in Christchurch will be torn down after residents complained.

A parish councillor was quoted as saying: "The people who wanted to catch the bus were waiting in the rain anyway because it was a hard job to maintain the bus shelter in a hygienic condition."

Cash-strapped Nexus has negotiated a 25% increase in its rail grant settlement with the DfT for its Metro light rail service next year. This figure will increase by a further 12.5% in 2007/08. The rise is dependent on there being no fare increases more than 1% above inflation for two years, and no contraction of services. Metro was £8m in the red in 2005.



Some interesting facts about the new £2.5m Coach Station at Stansted have emerged since work started on the building last week: 39% of passengers use public transport to get to and from the Airport, while bus and coach mode share has grown from 6.9% in 2000 to 13.9% in 2005. Local bus patronage has grown by over 300% in the last five years. Nicola Hooper, BAA Stansted's head of Transport says: "It is extremely important that we continue to provide high quality facilities to meet this demand as bus and coach services play an important part in Stansted's wider surface access strategy. Stansted already has the highest public transport mode share of all UK airports, and third highest in Europe, and this new facility will increase capacity to allow up to five million travellers a year to use bus and coach travel to get to and from the airport." The work will last six months. During this time bays 11-28 will be out of service. Charter coaches should use bays 1-3 to drop off and pick up, and wait in the Lay Over bays opposite.

revamped Edmonton bus garage last week. The occasion also marked the delivery of the 390th bendy bus to enter service in the capital.

Peter Hendy said: "This is one of the busiest bus garages in north London, serving hundreds of thousands of passengers each day. The state-of-the-art facilities here will ensure that services run as efficiently as possible to help make passengers' journeys as smooth as possible and deliver the Mayor's Transport Strategy."

Arriva's Edmonton depot is the base for 33 of its bendy buses, out of a total of 157 the company operates in the capital. Mark Yexley, managing director of Arriva Londonm, is a big fan. He said: "They are more comfortable, have superb accessibility levels, and our drivers love them."

Arriva's bendies are maintained by specialist **Evobus** technicians based at Edmonton. The garage, which first opened in 1997, was expanded in 2003 when Arriva bought an adjoining timber yard to provide more parking spaces for the articulated buses, which arrived in April 2004. There are now 300 drivers and 134 buses based at the garage, on Stonehill Business Park. Poor soil conditions meant the new pits were built from reinforced concrete instead of being pre-fabricated and two major water mains running underneath the site forced the whole building to be relocated.

SOUTH EAST

Oxfordshire County Council is undertaking a review of supported bus services in Witney, Carterton and Eynsham areas in an effort to cut its £4m annual subsidy bill. "We will look at each route on an individual basis but if we find that some journeys are carrying only a few passengers then we will have to think carefully about whether we should use council money to keep them running," says transport spokesman Cllr David Robertson. The results of the review will be announced in December.

SOUTH WEST

The arrangements at the temporary **Colchester** Bus Station will change on June 5 as Phase 2 of the regeneration project goes ahead. Entry and exit will be from Queen Street only, the former access on High Street/East Hill has closed.

Coaches will be able to pick up and drop off at Stop 1. There will be no layover facilities for coaches at the Temporary Bus Station. All coaches needing to layover should use the coach and lorry parking available in Sheepen Road.

For more information see *www.colchester.gov.uk*. Click on 'Bus Station Redevelopment' for details of Phase 2, and add/parking for details of alternative coach parking after dropping off visitors

Roadworks

A66 Penrith
Current: One lane closed due to bridge maintenance work on M6 both ways at J40.

M60 Greater Manchester
Current: One lane closed for barrier repairs anti-clockwise between J24 (A57) and J23 (A6410/A635).

M1 Hertfordshire
Until December 31, 2008: Speed restriction of 40 mph and narrow lanes both ways between J6A M25 and J10 M1 (Luton Airport).

M25 Waltham Abbey
Until December 31: One lane closed and 40mph speed restriction both ways between J25 (A10) and J26 (A121). Exit sliproad closed at J25 clockwise.

M5 North Somerset
Until July 31: Speed restriction both ways between J19 A369 (Portishead) and J20 B3133 (Clevedon).

M4 Taunton
Until July 31: Speed restriction of 50mph between J25 (A358) and J26 (A38).

M4 South Gloucestershire
Until August 31: Speed restriction and narrow lanes both ways between J18 (A46) and J19 (M32).

M4 Wiltshire
Until May 27: Lane closed due to roadworks between J15 (A419) and J16 (A3102/B4005).

A38 West Midlands
Until June 19: Bassett's Pole Island. Closed for widening to three lanes from 20:00 until 06:00 weekends between May 19-May 22; June 2-June 5; June 9-June 12; and June 16-June 19.

M6 Staffordshire
Until June 30: Speed restriction of 40 mph due to resurfacing work on M6 Northbound between J12 A5 (Gailey) and J13 A449 (Stafford South).

In association with
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www.trafficlink.co.uk

York sets out its coaching strategy

City bids to improve its coach facilities

Provisions for improving coach facilities and movements in York are included in a Local Transport Plan for 2006 to 2011, produced by the City of York.

More than four million tourists visit York every year, making it one of the most popular tourist destinations in the UK.

The coaching trade in York is made up of three broad markets – group charter, occasional excursions and longer tours that include overnight accommodation. The city council consulted with coach drivers and passengers and representatives of the industry in compiling the strategy and also drew on data compiled by First Stop York, an organization set up to promote the city as a tourist destination, and from the annual York Visitors' Survey.

The feedback highlighted a number of key concerns:

- York is not coach friendly because there are no shelters at coach parks, no toilets at rendezvous points and the rendezvous points are not in attractive locations for sites.
- Dissatisfaction with the long walk from coach parks and rendezvous points to the city centre attractions.
- Hotels were perceived to be more expensive in York than in Scarborough and Harrogate, so fewer people stayed in the city.
- Drivers complained of a lack of information leaflets, a lack of overnight coach parking and felt that York was an expensive place to visit.
- Attractions on the periphery of the central area cannot attract coach tourists and the evening tourist market is sluggish and hard to develop.
- Coaches cannot use the bus lanes on the Tadcaster Road.

On the positive side, 90% of visitors questioned said that they would recommend York as a destination for a coach tour.

In response, the City of York authorities hope to provide improvements for coaches by implementing a number of changes and better promotion of key festivals, providing new hotels for the coach market and opening a new coach park at Union Terrace.

The special events include the Viking Festival, Ebor Race Week, the Festival of Food and Drink and St Nicholas Fair. Of these only the Ebor Race Week and the St. Nicholas Fair cause peaks in coach traffic in York, with the St Nicholas Fair causing the most problems because it is in the centre. The special measures include the conversion of a car park into a coach park and pre-booked parking. However, questionnaires revealed that only 5% of drivers pre-booked spaces, the remainder saying it was considered unnecessary and there was an additional cost for advanced bookings. It is proposed that more drivers be encouraged to pre-book.

Wall together: a new strategy should make the going even less congested for groups visiting the city of York

As for coaches being banned from bus lanes, research showed that 78% of drivers ignored the restriction so the strategy recommended that as there was no operational problems associated with the bus lanes being used by coaches, the necessary changes to the traffic regulation orders should be advertised in due course in order to facilitate the movement of tour coaches. This work should be carried out in conjunction with a review of the signing aimed at assisting coach drivers travelling on the city's road network.

The strategy also found that the current system of banning coaches from parts of the York inner ring road appears to work well. There is widespread knowledge amongst drivers and consequently there have been few infringements. The system does allow relaxations to the ban with the police approval mainly in relation to special events, school parties and elderly and disabled coach parties.

As for coach parking facilities and

Renaissance of Hampton Court

One of the largest series of Renaissance paintings outside Italy, The Triumphs of Caesar – a series of nine works by Andrea Mantegna, will be back on display at Hampton Court Palace in the autumn to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the death of the artist.

The re-display will help visitors learn about the history of royal collections at Hampton Court Palace as well as exploring the significance of the paintings themselves. It will also include the creation of a new route for visitors to follow,

Unique: Hampton Court Palace

leading them from their arrival in the palace's central Base Court to the Lower Orangery within the South Gardens where paintings are on show.

The nine canvases represent the triumphs of Julius Caesar after the Gallic Wars and other military victories. They are probably the first attempt to show such a subject on a huge scale since Roman times. Originally purchased by King Charles I in 1629, these huge canvases were brought to England with several other purchases including work by Titian, Raphael and Caravaggio and confirmed the King's collection as one of the finest in the world.

- Hampton Court Palace is open daily, except from December 24 to 26. For more details and group bookings, call 0870 751 7070.

costs, it was felt that the number of spaces was adequate for all but the busiest times. However, coach parking is not available on all radials, hence there is a need for drivers to travel around the central area road network, which leads to delays for the visitors and contributes to unnecessary congestion. The cost of coach parking in the central area is reviewed each year and is considered to be in line with similar destinations.

Overnight parking of coaches can take place at secure lorry park facilities on the outskirts of York. At present this facility only operates Monday to Saturday because the demand is not there to justify opening at the weekends. Coach visitors generally stay at hotels outside the city at weekends

As for increased rendezvous sites, the City of York examined a number of sites and found that the most promising would be to provide a facility in either Clifford Street or Piccadilly which would serve several major tourist attractions nearby. Provision of a facility at either of these sites would require a relaxation of the access restriction. Additional work is required as to how coaches would be routed to and from either of these locations.

■ A copy of the full coach strategy document may be downloaded from www.york.gov.uk/transport

Fast forward to Holland

Operators planning tours in Holland, Germany and beyond should check out the fares from Stena Line on its service from Harwich to the Hook of Holland. They have the option of using the HSS service that takes under four hours or opting for a leisurely cruise on a Superferry that operates day and night crossings.

The HSS departs Harwich at 10.40am and arrives in the Hook of Holland at 3.20pm giving groups plenty of time for an onward journey to their hotel in time for an early evening arrival. There is a second departure at 7.20pm that arrives in Holland at five minutes before midnight.

The Superferry departs at 8.45am and arrives at 4.15pm and there is a second departure at 11.30pm, which enables passengers to book a cabin and arrive in Holland at 7.30am the following morning. Departures from Holland are at 7.20am and 4pm on the HSS and 2.30pm and 10pm on the Superferry.

Single fares for large coaches with no maximum number of passengers are £422 per vehicle on Superferry day crossings until the end of September, dropping to £359 from October to December. Overnight fares are £543 and £482 respectively. Travel on the HSS and the fare is £422 per coach until September and £359 from October to December.

Coaches up to a maximum of 12 metres and with up to 20 passengers, including the driver, qualify for a rate of £295 for a Superferry daytime crossing up to September, dropping to £252 from October to December. Overnight crossings cost £380 and £337 respectively. Opt for the speedy HSS service and the fares are £295 and £252 respectively.

Groups who use the Superferry service qualify for free meals while there are special meal rates on the HSS service. Breakfast costs £7 per adult and £4 per child, lunch is £10 for adults and £5 for children and dinner is £11 and £6 respectively. The latest check-in for the Superferry is 60 minutes before departure. The latest check-in for the HSS service is 30 minutes before departure.

■ For bookings and more information call Stena Line on 08705 204402 or email: groups@stenaline.com

Sailing by: get Hooked by Stena Line and book a crossing to Holland

The magnificent SS Great Britain

Brunel at the double

Bristol tourism officials are marking the 200th anniversary of the birth of Isambard Kingdom Brunel by offering groups a special package that combines two exhibitions.

The offer comprises visits to the Forces that made IK Brunel in Explore@Bristol and the Nine Lives of IK Brunel at SS Great Britain, winner of the prestigious Gulbenkian Prize for the UK's most innovative museum. The cost is £13 per person (minimum group of 30 people) and includes boat transport between the two exhibitions. Advance booking is essential by calling @Bristol on 0117 915 5000.

"You put profit before safety considerations"

Traffic commissioner tells Derby-based Hawkes Coaches that their repute and professional competence is on the line

A number of prohibitions, MoT failures, and an unsatisfactory maintenance investigation opened up a can of worms when Derby-based independent operator Hawkes Coaches appeared at a public inquiry before North Western Traffic Commissioner Beverley Bell. No improvement in safety inspection intervals since December, and a last-minute set of corrective actions, made Mrs Bell look closely at the operator, and she adjourned the inquiry until November to see whether standards would improve. In issuing an interim order, she suspended half of the operator's fleet during the next school holidays, but made it clear that the VOSA spotlight was now on, and would determine the future of the company when the inquiry resumes.

David Hawkes, trading as Hawkes Coaches, based at the Eagle Centre Market, Derby, and operating from the Arriva Derby premises at Ascot Drive, Derby, faced a public inquiry at Wigan Magistrates Court, to consider regulatory action, resulting from an unsatisfactory maintenance investigation, prohibitions acquired, statements of intent not fulfilled, and concerns regarding the question of professional competence, repute and financial standing.

At the beginning of the inquiry, Mrs Bell said that she was satisfied with financial information submitted prior to the inquiry, and would not be discussing finances any further.

Terence Fearns, vehicle examiner from VOSA, submitted a pre-inquiry report, which was accepted as evidence. Mr Fearns' report said that he had examined vehicles and records at the HGV testing station in Derby on December 12, 2005, and found several shortcomings in the company's frequency of safety inspections. The company had undertaken to arrange safety inspections every six weeks on its fleet of ten vehicles, but he found that on some vehicles there had been longer intervals. He expressed concern at the poor MoT record of the company, and said that in his opinion, many of the faults could have been detected by drivers on their walk-round checks. He said that a failure of Metrobus D924 NDA on January 10 was through a nearside wiper split and upper saloon seat damage, which should have been recorded on defect sheets. Similarly, on January 18, Metrobus KYV 647X had an inoperative upper saloon light, and a loose offside mirror, but neither had been listed on the defect sheets.

Mr Fearns listed the MoT records of four vehicles. Metrobus KYV 749X had failed in 2001, 2002 and 2004. Metrobus POG 562Y had failed in 2003. Coach F270 ASJ had only passed in one year - 2003 - and coach PJI 5751 had failed in every year from 2003 to 2005. He listed four prohibitions, which included a delayed PG9 for an oil leak on Metrobus KYV 647X on June 20 2001, an immediate on the same vehicle 11 days later for sharp metal edges, and an advisory on the same day for wheel nuts digging into a wheel. There was an immediate PG9 on the same vehicle on June 11 2002 for serious body panel damage, and another immediate on coach F270 ASJ for a nearside rear outer tyre worn below legal limits. In his opinion, all the faults should have come to light at the drivers' check stage he said.

> **Looking at your past history, how can I trust you in the future?**
> Traffic commissioner Beverley Bell

Summarising, Mr Fearns said that having spoken to Mr Hawkes, he felt that the shortcomings identified, should now have been rectified by him. He referred specifically to the inspection frequency, and problems with the quality of driver defect reporting. "However," he said, "it is clear from the prohibition notices, and the poor MoT record, that there are shortcomings in the maintenance system, leading to concerns over the operator's ability to maintain vehicles in a fit and roadworthy condition."

Representing Mr Hawkes, David Glover revealed that there had been two subsequent prohibitions on November 23 and 27 on the same vehicle for an inoperative stop lamp. He said that in each case, the lights and casings were replaced, but it was subsequently discovered by a repairer that there was a problem with wiring and the brake light switch, which led to intermittent faults, until it was all renewed.

Giving evidence for the company, David Hawkes said that the maintenance arrangements had been changed, following Arriva's decision not to take on any outside repair and maintenance work. He had then used a Volvo main dealer 10 miles away, but found the service unsatisfactory, as that company was not really geared up to the needs of a bus operator. He said that eight of his vehicles were now maintained by another independent operator, Harpurs Coaches, where the fleet engineer had previously worked for Arriva, and where the company had taken on additional fitters. Two of his Setra coaches were maintained by McPherson coaches of Swadlincote, because Harpurs' insurance did not cover vehicles valued at more than £50,000. He said that he now realised that he had not notified all the maintenance arrangement changes, but he must have forgotten to do it.

"Since Mr Fearns' visit and the call up letter, I have realised a lot more of what has to be done," he said. He produced documents, which outlined a new driver defect reporting procedure, and said that drivers were due for a training session with an outside consultant in early June. "It was never my intention to deceive anyone, or to make cheap short cuts, but sometimes vehicles were not available for checks or contractors couldn't fit them in on time" he added.

Key points

- **VOSA investigation will determine future of the company**
- **Defendent claimed it was difficult to get independent maintenance service**
- **Half the fleet suspended for school holidays**

He produced a new service planner and said that there were no excuses for the past, but that the problems had now been addressed.

Cross-examined by the traffic commissioner, Mr Hawkes admitted that he had not notified any convictions and that there were at least three speeding convictions, one of which involved a bus. He also admitted that he had not notified the licence suspension of his own son, Chris, who had now had his licence returned, and who was taking a closer role in the management of the company, and was scheduled to sit his CPC examinations in November.

Mrs Bell referred him to recent documents submitted and asked whether the introduction of a new driver defect reporting system, and the purchase of the VOSA video on walk-round checks was the result of the calling-up letter.

"You are getting a free audit from VOSA, and I am interested in how you have responded to their advice. It looks to me that you have acted at the very last minute, and I'm worried that you are putting commercial consideration above all other things." she said. "You were told in December what you needed to do, and here we are, with you showing the drivers the VOSA video a week before the public inquiry"

"Operators usually sit up and take notice when they see the whites of my eyes, and you have pots of money, more than sufficient funds, to invest in technology and best practice."

"For instance, are you a member of the CPT? Did you get an invitation to our training seminars? Did you have one for the seminar last week? These are all out there to help you keep up with the latest legislation, such as the working time directive." she added,

Mrs Bell then asked for a random sample of inspection records from 2006, and reported her findings to the inquiry.

"W214 UGX was seen on January 13 and was due on February 24, but was not done until March 24. It was then due on May 5, but was not done until May 18. BL02 XJU was seen on December 20, was due on January 31, but was not done until February 21, due again on April 4 but not done till the 6. KYV 749X was seen on November 2 and due on December 14, but was not done until January 16, due again on February 27 but actually done on March 1. NBZ due on December 8 but not done until January 13.

Operators usually take notice when they see the whites of my eyes

Traffic commissioner Beverley Bell

B863 DOM was due on November 25, but checked on December 5, due January 16, but seen on February 1, due again on March 15, but not checked until the 27. What can you say to me about this?"

"It looks to me as if you haven't addressed any of these problems. Mr Fearns was very supportive of you, but looking at your past history, how can I trust you in the future?

Delivering her verdict, the traffic commissioner said that the matter had gone well beyond that of a formal warning. She said that Mr Fearns had identified problems with the driver defect reporting system, safety check intervals, prohibitions and annual test history, last December, where regular servicing went to the heart of the operator's repute.

"You as transport manager must make sure that you have proper arrangements to ensure compliance. I think your business has grown, but you are still running it on your own.

This case is about the length of time it has taken you to get things sorted, and about the length of time it has still to take. If you are too busy to do that, then you will have to offload it," she declared.

"I am quite satisfied that you allowed commercial considerations to override road safety, but I am not going to make an adverse finding on your repute today, I will adjourn this inquiry until November 30, and will revisit these matters then, but until then, your repute and professional competence is on the table."

In the meantime, you will get a visit from VOSA and they will crawl all over your vehicles, your records and your tachographs, and you have a mountain to climb. If you get a bad report, it will tip the balance against you."

"Your business review needs to be undertaken sooner rather than later, so I am issuing an interim order suspending half of your fleet from the May 26 to June 4, during the school holidays, to give you a chance to work on these vehicles," she added.

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by Sue Reynolds

Tarred with the same brush?

It's said that a happy customer will tell two other people, while an unhappy customer will tell 10. But short-term money-grabbing holiday companies are ensuring that all coach operators get a poor repuation

As an industry we share customers. This is not to say that there is no customer loyalty, but rather to suggest that coach-holiday customers will search the market for the package that best fits their needs. This bothers me because when one operator lets them down they tell 10 friends about their bad coach holiday. In this way we all get tarred with the same brush. As an operator offering a small holiday programme I mind losing customers over problems caused by others.

Recently some of the biggest names in this industry have badly treated my parents (good coach customers) and I know they are not alone.

Through a national newspaper advertisement, Mum and Dad booked a self-drive weekend break. The hotel is owned and operated by a large coach operator. On Sunday I get a call:

"Dad is ill, what can we do?"

"Hold tight I'll come and get you."

"Room 224."

Arriving at the hotel, no one was on the desk; eventually I found a receptionist, explained the situation and added that we were leaving a car in the car park until the following day - curtly she advised that was really inconvenient for them.

I followed a corridor with missing light switches - by which I mean square holes with bare wires. I found the room; it is March and cold. The hotel's boilers are not working - they were fitted before Christmas and it seems they have never worked. A sign at reception said that electric heaters were available, and there was one in the room. Beneath the radiator was an ice cream tub collecting the drips; it needed frequent emptying.

The furniture was threadbare, down to the cords, stuffing showing and only fit for a skip. The room was shabby with paint was peeling off the window sill. The ensuite had paper falling off the walls and acres of black mould beneath. There was no hot water.

On Monday as we returned to pick up the car, I was horrified to see coachloads arriving.

Back home, Mum and Dad complete the customer satisfaction questionnaire; they send it to the area's hotel manager with an accompanying letter. Reply? None came. Following further correspondences with head office they received a voucher and an explanation that the questionnaire might have been lost (and they are only used for statistical purposes anyway).

Will they use the voucher? Will they go anywhere with that company again? What do you think?

In January, Mum booked a holiday because it offered a coach pick-up in her home town. The confirmation stated: "We will issue coach tickets departing from your town's interchange, Stand B". The trip was just a month away, when she received a call to say the coach journey would be far too long for her and out of consideration for her wellbeing she should find another way to get there - drive herself, or go by train. Mum cannot drive that far and by train it is a complicated and expensive journey.

The customer care staff could not give a damn. They refused to listen, would only give the prepared and scripted speech. She couldn't go unless she got a coach pick-up from her home town, so she had no option but to request a refund. They would give her 100% of the coach cost (£36) but she would lose 60% of the holiday cost, because she was cancelling at such a late date.

The company refused to listen to any argument. It was not their fault that they had only just told her that they were cancelling her coach... after all, she should have known that "travel is just provisional and subject to change".

This is not a coach company, it is one that specialises in all types of holiday, but from Mum's point of view this was a coach holiday.

Will she go anywhere with this company again? Will she tell her friends? What do you think?

Sue Reynolds is a director of Reynolds Diplomat

If you want to let off some steam, just tap away at the keyboard and send your rant (or carefully-reasoned views) to cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk, or fax 0845 280 2927. Make 'Open Platform' the subject line. Alternatively, send your missive to Coach and Bus Week, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Peterborough PE7 8FD

Fortunately our parents regard super-cheap offers with suspicion. In fairness to the holiday company concerned, they realised that forcing Mum to undertake an excessively long coach journey was not reasonable. Too often other companies neglect to advise passengers that they will spend many hours, even all day, travelling around picking up passengers.

When doing things on the cheap, every corner has to be cut. When operators accept contracts to provide vehicles below an economic price they might be forgiven for sending out an older coach.

They might pay the driver a lower rate and encourage him to make up his money by selling excursions. I am told that these drivers have to pay back to the company a proportion of the excursion's earnings. So, the customer on the holiday has to pay extra to get back onto the coach each and every day. Having, eventually, arrived at the venue the customer is subjected to a "welcome" hard sell which continues throughout the holiday.

Unbelievably low prices don't just steal customers from local operators who are offering a holiday package with a fair price; they then produce disgruntled customers who will never come back to coach holidays.

These are good loyal customers and frequent travellers. As an industry we are not good at attracting the younger holiday makers and it seems that some of the 'big boys' are determined to just rip off the existing customer base.

Your short-term money-grabbing expedient is the industry's long-term disaster. Shame on you!

Send your letters to *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk*, fax 0845 2802927 or write to:
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LEZ – age limit would have to be higher

Thank you for covering the issue regarding the proposed Low Emission Zone in London.

However, there was a misinterpretation of the CPT policy on a possible age limit. While we have said we would *consider* the imposition of an age limit rather than Euro standards, we could only do so on the basis of it being *greater* than the eight years proposed by the freight sector, as it would need to take into account the longer working life of a coach.

Our current position still favours Euro standards on the basis that an operator could, albeit at a cost, upgrade their vehicle appropriately.

Allan Edmondson, head of coach services, CPT UK, Kingsway, London

5 YEARS AGO **First Leicester invests £7 million to buy 58 double and single-deck buses and Arriva announces a £2.9 million investment to pay for new low-floor buses in the autumn.**

10 YEARS AGO **It was announced by the Rural Development Commission that the Rural Transport Development funds are to be increased by over 40 per cent to £1.25 million over the next year, and assistance can now be given to public sector or charitable organisations to make better use of the vehicles they already own.**

20 YEARS AGO ***Coachmart* reports on the celebrations at Leyland's technical centre at Moss Side earlier in the month to mark the company's 90-year history. At the event, around 300 preserved or commercially active examples of the company's production were on display.**

LETTER OF THE WEEK

It's Day 1 and all pick-ups are completed after anything up to 4 ½ hours. The coach is full of strangers and it is legally time for the driver's break. There's a suitable stopping place up ahead - a service area or a coach park in a town en route and the driver, having announced there will be a break, pulls in. Most of the passengers stir themselves and get off, but there are always the die-hards with flasks who want to stay put. What does the tour driver do next?

- Stick to the letter of the law and insist the passengers leave only to have them phone the tour company, who will often tell the driver to let them stay on board - although coach operators will sometimes back the driver.
- Leave the passengers on the coach. This may lead to pilfering of personal possessions left inside by others away on their break. Anyone could board the vehicle and help themselves - after all, they are all still strangers to each other at this stage. The coach door is open and it's a chilly day, there's always someone who will try to close it with manhandling if need be - yes this happened to a colleague of mine and led to a damaged door which necessitated a change of coach!
- Toilets - the coach should always be left with the master switch off, so therefore the toilet won't work and could prove a problem if used.

Staying on board after Day 1 of a tour when everyone knows each other, it may be that some of the passengers still want to do so and offer to provide 'security'. This does not always work because on occasion the driver will return to find the passengers have disappeared to the toilet or a walk or whatever and the coach is unattended.

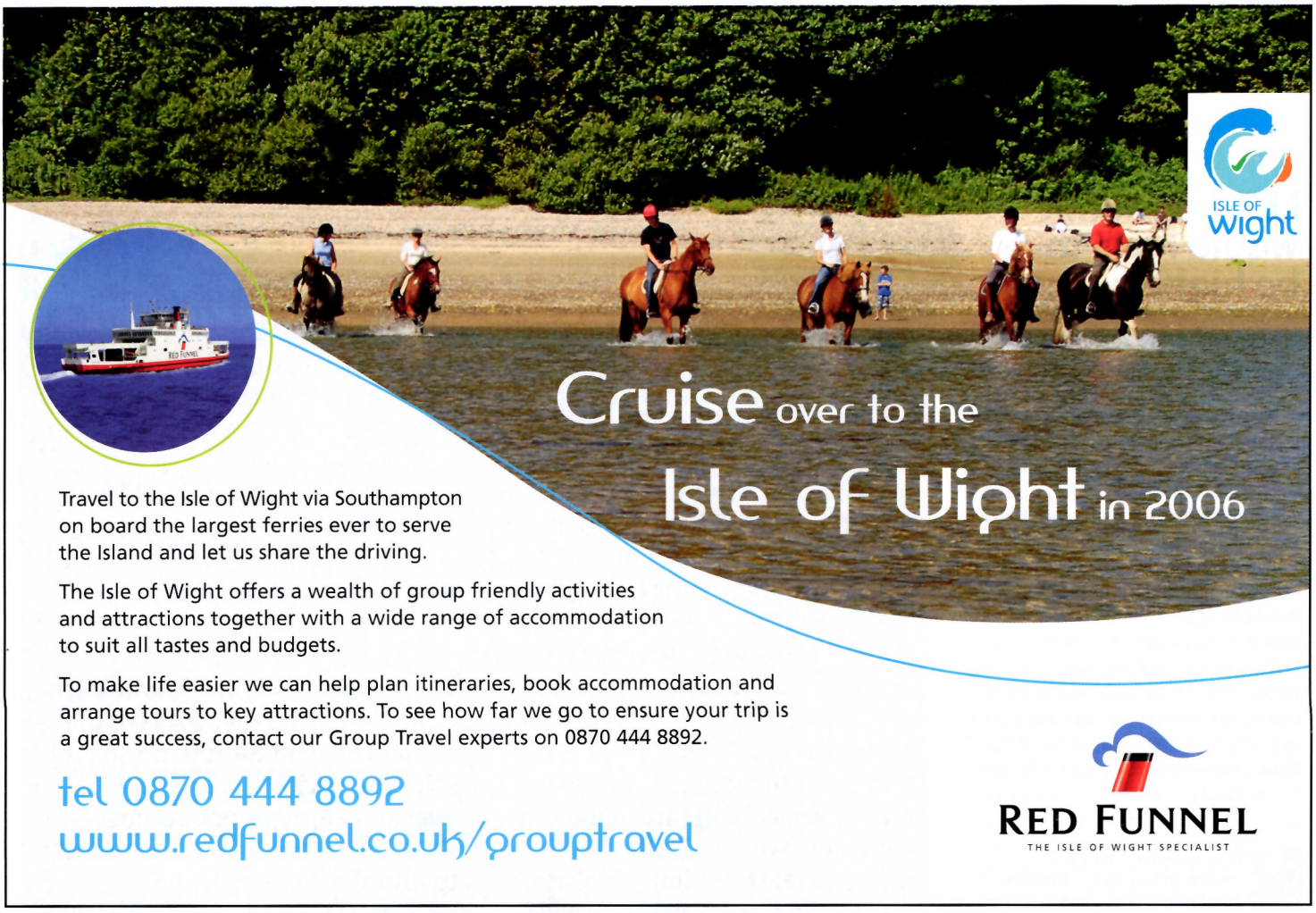
Please could the law, if there is one, be 'firmed up' to say a coach should be cleared of passengers and locked for the duration of a legal break.

Joe Knox, Tour Coach Driver, Parks of Hamilton

WIN A BUS! Sort of... Drop us a line and if your letter is chosen as our Letter of the Week, you'll receive a top-notch coach or bus model courtesy of our friends at Corgi. Please try to keep your letters under 200 words. The editor's decision is final.

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE...

- Bus grants: will you get the money without re-regulation?
- Out+About: your monthly window on coach tourism
- What YOU think - your letters, Open Platform, and views on the top stories



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Wight holds out the olive branch

After the recent parking own goal the Isle of Wight is on a charm offensive. *CBW* reports

The Isle of Wight has assured coach operators that it welcomes their tour business in a 'summit' meeting with the Coach Tourism Council, Confederation of Passenger Transport, Wightlink and *CBW*.

Senior figures from the island's council and chamber of commerce were countering bad publicity from the decision - now reversed - to hike coach parking charges to £100 a week, and to counter comments made by outspoken Conservative councillor Andy Sutton, who controversially claimed in a magazine that it is policy to drive coaches away from the island.

Now the council has retreated on parking charges to a more modest £60 a week and addressed another problem by changing the start of the 'parking day'.

The council also met up with the CTC, CPT and Mark Williams, editor of *CBW*, to explain its coach tourism policy.

Councillor Ian Ward said coach parking charges had become entangled in a general policy to double parking charges for cars, HGVs and other vehicles, and although the proposal was publicised through the local press, the council heard no objections until after the charges had gone up.

"Two hotels spoke to me and said they thought the charge a bit steep," said Mr Ward. "So we reintroduced the four-day permit for £60, then it all went quiet until it was publicised by *Coach and Bus Week*. Then all hell broke loose."

Isle attraction: Simon Dabell's Blackgang Chine visitor attraction has something for everyone. Below: Blackgang Chine cliffs tumble into the sea

Mr Ward said that although the council had wanted to talk to operators before making the decision, the problem was that it was not sure who in the industry to consult. "We have now put right the injustices," he said.

In addition to changing the four-day permit price to cover an entire week, Isle of Wight has moved the charging period to begin at 10.00 hrs instead of midnight, so that coach parties have time to leave before accruing another day charge.

"Timing was an issue," the chief executive of CTC, Chris Wales told the meeting. "The holidays had already been brochured and sold, so there was little hope of recovering the parking charge. The industry needed more warning."

Kevin Smith, chief executive of the Isle of Wight Chamber of Commerce, said the focus suddenly placed on coach visits had led to a greater understanding of coach tourism:

"In that respect the outcome has been that we now understand better how coaches fit into the jigsaw of the island's tourism," he said. "We now know it's vitally important - a vital part of the mix."

Tim Hunter-Henderson, business development councillor, appealed directly to operators to reinstate tours and then judge the Isle of Wight on its performance: "I would like to reiterate that the Isle of Wight welcomes and values coach tourism," he said.

Coach Tourism Council chief executive Chris Wales is now to recommend to the CTC board that a cancelled familiarisation visit is reinstated.

After the meeting, he said: "The parking charge hike was compounded by Andy Sutton's offhand remarks about the coach industry, but to its credit the council and chamber of commerce reacted quickly and positively to the situation, addressing the parking issue straight away.

"During our visit we heard much that is very positive from the council, and saw some superb attractions which are clearly committed to coaching. I believe it is now time to draw a line here, bring our customers to this beautiful island, and for the industry to help in any way it can to help develop Isle of Wight tourism."

Useful numbers

THEMED PARKS

- **Blackgang Chine, Chale** Tel. 01983 730052 www.blackgangchine.com
- **The Needles Park, Alum Bay** Tel. 0870 458 0022 www.theneedles.co.uk info@theneedles.co.uk
- **Robin Hill, Arreton** 01983 730052 www.robin-hill.com

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

- **Appuldurcombe House, Wroxall** 01983 852484 www.appuldurcombe.co.uk
- **Arreton Manor, Arreton** 01983 528134 www.arretonmanor.co.uk
- **Bembridge Windmill, Bembridge** 01983 873945 www.nationaltrust.org.uk
- **Brading Roman Villa, Brading** 01983 406223 www.bradingromanvilla.org.uk
- **Calbourne Water Mill, Calbourne** 01983 531227 www.calbournewatermill.co.uk
- **Carisbrooke Castle, Newport** 01983 522107 www.english-heritage.org.uk
- **Dimbola Lodge Museum, Freshwater** 01983 756814 www.dimbola.co.uk.
- **Isle of Wight Steam Railway, Smallbrook Junction, Wootton** 01983 882204 www.iwsteamrailway.co.uk
- **Morton Manor, Brading** 01983 406168
- **Mottistone Manor Garden, Mottistone** 01983 741302 www.nationaltrust.org.uk
- **The Needles Old Battery, West Wight** 01983 754772 www.nationaltrust.org.uk
- **Newport Roman Villa, Newport** 01983 529720 www.iwight.com
- **Nunwell House, Brading** 01983 407240
- **The Old Town Hall, Newtown** 01983 531785 www.nationaltrust.org.uk
- **Osborne House, East Cowes** 01983 200022 www.english-heritage.org.uk
- **Quarr Abbey, nr Binstead** 01983 882420
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Island shows off its wares

Four major attractions demonstrated their commitment to visiting coaches during a brief tour.

One of the oldest and best-loved attractions, **Blackgang Chine**, was filling with coachloads of school children during the visit, and its proprietor, Simon Dabell, explained how the site will be developed in the near future.

Currently, Blackgang Chine offers clifftop gardens, a sawmill museum, maze, themed gardens, rides and a good restaurant for visitors. But coming soon will be a complete change of direction.

Simon Dabell is planning a £800,000 retail village where the children's attractions are currently sited. The rides will be relocated at the Dabell family's other venue, Robin Hill.

"We have been looking very carefully at changes in the market, and it is now 'empty nesters' aged 50 or so," he said. An old pub on site will be converted into a tea room with 60 covers, and pitched at the upper end of the market.

"We will be also be starting a 'watch and buy' craft centre, where people can see goods being made, then take some away. It will be free to get in, and will depend on our offer being good enough for them to spend money," he said.

Blackgang Chine (the Chine meaning a valley) is one of the island's oldest and most popular tourist attractions, established in the 1800s as a garden. It attracts 190,000 visitors a year, and has a very high turnover of coach groups.

Dinosaur Isle in Sandown is a big hit with school trips in particular

Developments at **Amazon World** will include moving the coach parking adjacent to the entrance - a move forced on the owners by the success of the attraction with groups.

At present, there's room for four coaches right next to the gift shop, and more a short walk away. But soon all coaches will take pride of place alongside new disabled parking.

The wildlife park, which has some impressive collections of tropical birds in its converted horticultural greenhouses, has a major role in breeding rare species and that is where all its income goes. With a strong emphasis on education, it is one of the most popular attractions for groups.

Every year, it launches two major projects so that visitors will see something new on every visit. Last year, it managed 90,000 visitors and with level floors almost throughout, is perfect for the elderly and wheelchairs.

Amazon World wildlife park is expanding its coach parking because of its success in attracting groups

Dinosaur Isle in Sandown is another attraction with an educational brief. It takes visitors through a 'time tunnel' to the age of the dinosaurs, with very impressive fossils on show including dinosaur skeletons and replicas, and displays explaining the evolutionary history which is exposed with every tide when more fossils are washed from the south coast of the island.

And among the most impressive of the historic attractions on the island is the **Brading Roman Villa** - an old excavation with a new roof.

Originally excavated by amateur Victorian archaeologists, the dig at Brading quickly revealed a very large Roman villa with impressive mosaic floors. For many years it was covered with a simple shed, but grants bought a superb purpose-built building which allows visitors to walk over the walls and floors for a really close inspection.

Brading was originally a sea port on a long tidal creek, long since dried up. Artefacts recovered during the excavation are in imaginative displays throughout the building, which also has a café capable of feeding an entire coach group (with prior notice).

Our sponsor was **Wightlink**, the dominant ferry company operating from Portsmouth into Fishbourne. Sales director Ian Winn said Isle of Wight maps explaining the preferred routes to destinations are distributed to operators and drivers.

SHOPPING

- **Alum Bay Glass, Needles Park, Alum Bay** 0870 458 0022 www.theneedles.co.uk
- **Arreton Barns Craft Village, Arreton** 01983 528353 www.arretonbarns.co.uk
- **Chessell Pottery Barns, Calbourne** 01983 531248 www.chessellpotterybarns.co.uk
- **Isle of Wight Glass, St Lawrence** 01983 853526
- **Isle of Wight Pearl, nr Brighstone** 01983 740352
- **Quay Arts, Newport** 01983 822490 www.quayarts.org

WILDLIFE

- **Amazon World Zoo Park, nr Arreton** 01983 867122 www.amazonworld.co.uk
- **Brickfields Horse Country, Binstead** 01983 566801 www.brickfields.net
- **Butterfly and Fountain World, Wootton** 01983 883430 www.butterfly-world-iow.co.uk
- **Colemans Animal Farm, Porchfield** 01983 522831 www.colemansfarm.com
- **Isle of Wight Donkey Sanctuary, Wroxall** 01983 852693
- **Isle of Wight Owl and Falconry Centre, Wroxall** 01983 852484 www.appuldurcombe.co.uk
- **Isle of Wight Zoo, Sandown** 01983 403883 www.isleofwightzoo.com
- **Marine Aquarium, Yarmouth** 01983 760283 www.fortvictoria.co.uk
- **Seaview Wildlife Encounter, Seaview** 01983 612261 www.flamingoparkiw.com

FARM + GARDEN

- **Adgestone Vineyard, nr Brading** 01983 402503 www.adgestonevineyard.co.uk
- **Fort Victoria Country Park, Yarmouth** 01983 823893 www.fortvictoria.co.uk
- **The Garlic Farm, Newchurch** 01983 865378 www.thegarlicfarm.co.uk
- **Morton Manor Gardens, Brading** 01983 406168
- **Rosemary Vineyard, Ashey** 01983 811084 www.rosemaryvineyard.co.uk

Shanklin old village typifies villages where a sensible attitude to coach parking and group visits is needed

Brading Roman Villa now benefits from a custom-built visitor centre that allows superb access

CBW says...

The furore over the Isle of Wight's coach parking charges followed by the ill-timed anti-coach interview with firebrand councillor Andy Sutton were the tourism equivalent of Gerald Ratner's statement that his jewellery was 'crap.'

What has been impressive since has been the reaction of the council and Chamber of Commerce who launched an immediate damage limitation exercise which went well beyond mere words. After a meeting at which grievances on both sides were aired, the coach parking charge has tumbled to £60 for seven days, 10.00hrs to 10.00hrs.

Perhaps more importantly, the council has had a chance to explain its tourism development policy properly, and in talking more to island operators and giving deeper thought to the coach tour experience on the island, says it now has a better understanding of how it might go forward with managing coach visits.

Make no mistake, on the Isle of Wight's often narrow roads and lanes and in chocolate-box villages such as Godshill, there is a great need for not only adequate coach set-down points and parking, but management of the coach traffic itself. Without it, drivers will inevitably be caught up in the midsummer car chaos and be seen as the source of the problem, when in fact group tourism is part of the solution.

If our visit needed any illustration of the reason there is some latent anti-coach sentiment, we got it during a car journey to Blackgang Chine when two coaches in front of us ignored a 7.5-tonne limit and took a minor road which has recently been re-routed after a major landslip. Along this road – clearly signposted – is a 6' 6" width restriction, at which the drivers had to stop to assess whether they could get through the gap.

This is either an operator problem or an island problem – the island should be more proactive in promoting its existing coach traffic system, and operators should ensure drivers are well aware of the policy, and the consequences of ignoring it. It is a pity that the Isle of Wight hadn't taken the bull by the horns some time ago. A three-year history of correspondence between the CPT, Police and the council reveals that the often complex issues have been buried for some time in obfuscation. The result is that the coaching arrangements are sometimes inadequate and often unclear.

The Isle of Wight's tourism portfolio depends on all its constituent parts, including the 120,000 coach visits carrying six million people to its hotels and attractions each year. Managed, the coaches can be slotted seamlessly into the patchwork of island life. Unmanaged, coaches pose a problem for both council and operator.

That message is now sinking in, and our visit showed that the island has had its wake-up call and is sounding very positive about coaches. There were no white flags, but there's a truce; let's put the Isle of Wight where it deserves to be on the coaching map, and judge the situation by the progress we make over the coming years.

- **Shanklin Chine, Shanklin** 01983 866432 www.shanklinchine.co.uk
- **Ventnor Botanic Gardens, Ventnor** 01983 855397 www.botanic.co.uk
- **Fort Victoria Model Railway, nr Yarmouth** 01983 761553 www.fortvictoria.co.uk
- **Island Planetarium and Astronomy Centre, Fort Victoria, Yarmouth** 0800 1958295 www.islandastronomy.co.uk
- **Lifeboat Station, Bembridge** 01983 875127
- **Brading, The Experience, Brading** 01983 407286 www.bradingtheexperience.co.uk
- **The Model Village, Godshill** 01983 840270 www.modelvillagegodshill.co.uk
- **Waltzing Waters, Ryde** 01983 811333

MUSEUMS + EDUCATIONAL

- **Brighstone Village Museum, Brighstone** 01983 740689 www.nationaltrust.org.uk
- **Carisbrooke Castle Museum, Newport** 01983 522107 www.english-heritage.org.uk
- **Classic Boat Museum, Seaclose Wharf, Newport Harbour** 01983 533493
- **Cowes Maritime Museum, Beckford Road, Cowes** 01983 823433
- **Dinosaur Farm Museum, nr Brighstone** 01983 740844 / 07970 626456 www.isleofwight.com/dinosaurfarm
- **Dinosaur Isle, Sandown** 01983 404344 www.dinosaurisle.com
- **Lilliput Museum of Antique Dolls and Toys, Brading** 01983 407231
- **Military History Museum, nr Cowes** 01983 527411 www.iowmhm.co.uk
- **Museum of Island History, Newport** 01983 823366 www.iwight.com
- **Natural History Centre, Shell Museum and Gift Shop, Godshill** 01983 840333
- **Underwater Archaeology Centre, Fort Victoria, Yarmouth** 01983 761214
- **Isle of Wight Bus Museum, Newport** 01983 533352

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Time to train

With the driver CPC on the horizon, the coach and bus industry has every good reason for addressing its training needs. CBW looks at what's coming soon, and the educational options

The nagging worry about all training is that, when it's over, the employee you've turned expert will go to the highest bidder.

When that concern applied to drivers you'd put through their PSV test, it was bad enough. But the up-coming driver CPC will push your investment even higher, and ensuring your trainees stay with you is all the more important.

There are a number of ways you can address the problem. One rather old-fashioned method is to 'bill' the employee for the training without demanding the payment. Only if the employee leaves the company before an agreed period does the 'payment' fall due.

But consider instead an incremental pay scale, in which the trainee earns a fixed proportion of your qualified rate, say 80%, in the first year, and gets set increments added for each year of employment up to the full rate. When an employee knows for certain that next year's pay rise is going to be at least 10% plus cost-of-living increase, there's less temptation to chase the dollar.

Workforces respect proper training patterns in which the learning process is documented and rewarded, whether with an NVQ, CPC or interim recognition, particularly when that can be seen by his or her peer group. Training should be high on the employee's agenda... and as you, the operator, will ultimately benefit, high on yours too.

Over the next eight pages, track down the training you need.

CPT warns that the clock is running on driver 'CPCs'

The Confederation of Passenger Transport says too little progress has been made on driver training to meet the new European Directive.

The directive was signed off in 2003, and changes must be introduced into the industry by September 2008 But the CPT says a concerted effort is needed over the coming months to decide what drivers and their employers will have to do so that operators can plan for a painless introduction.

The Government agency charged with making it all work is the Driving Standards Agency (DSA). Implementing the Vocational Training Directive is probably the most complex project that has ever come DSA's way. The Government had to make a choice between a 'defined training' and a 'defined testing' approach to vocational driving.

Having chosen the 'defined testing' route, it must apply it to passenger and goods drivers. CPT members were initially attracted by the 'defined training' option, which would have entailed the current practical and theory tests, preceded or followed by substantial amounts of training (up to 280 hours of course attendance).

The training option would have been attractive if 'on the job' training, the norm for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) could be counted towards the hours total. The freight sector, however, was more attracted by the 'defined testing' option, where drivers will be fully qualified for their job after two hours of practical tests and four hours of theory tests.

Drivers who already have a licence

People who have already qualified as PCV drivers (and demonstrated their expertise) will also be affected by the new arrangements. Although they will not have to pass a test, they will only be able to keep driving if they complete 35 hours of 'Periodic Training' every five years.

The EU Directive lays down that this training should be organised by an approved training centre, involve compulsory course attendance and should be given in periods of at least seven hours. The challenge to the industry (and Government) is to follow the Directive without wasting time with token training in subjects where the driver is

already competent, says the CPT in a recent Business Matters bulletin to membership

"Suppose a registered training centre provides you with self-contained DVD training modules on useful topics like transporting adolescents. Can your driver sit down for an hour a day, on your premises, on seven separate days and take a self-assessment at the end of the module?" says CPT.

"Or will you have to take him or her off the road and send him or her away for a day?"

'Incidental' drivers

It will be still be possible to obtain and hold a restricted licence for large passenger carrying vehicles (Category D) that will allow the holder to take buses for their annual test or take a coach out to a breakdown (for example).

The practical test for one of these licences will be the same as now and the theory test will be more demanding, but there will be no need to complete a case study. Importantly, neither existing nor new holders of restricted licences will need to receive periodic training in order to keep their licences.

Key Dates

September 10, 2006
UK implementing legislation due to be passed

September 9, 2008
Last day for getting a PCV licence under the current regime.

September 10 2008
New initial qualification regime comes in. Periodic training after this date can qualify towards the 35 hours-per-five-years requirement.

September 9, 2013
The likely date on which all licences that were issued before September 10, 2008 and were valid for more than five years will have to be renewed. In order to get them renewed, the holder will have to have completed 35 hours of periodic training.

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S&B aims high

Training is the key to productivity and driving quality forward. Martin Cole finds out why Stagecoach, MAN, Knorr-Bremse and others choose to use Bristol's S&B

Bristol-based S&B Training is aspiring to provide the highest standards of training in the world of commercial vehicle technicians.

S&B is an independent organisation which runs as a non-profit making training institution, taking much of its revenue from the government and the employers who send their trainees and apprentices to the facility to learn their trade and qualify in their chosen field. The range and scope of courses is continually expanding to cover all aspects of motor body repair, coachbuilding, auto-electronics, spraying and refinishing, maintenance technology and, more recently, management courses.

S&B Training has been operational in its present guise for three years and was formed from the amalgamation of long-established Severnside Training and Bristol Garages Group - both of which were created by local businesses to train their apprentices - some 30 years ago. The company was actually spawned in 1979, but it took a major step forward in 1997 when it acquired its own premises and largely moved away from conducting training and assessment at an employer's own premises - or hiring space at conventional Further Education establishments.

Dedicated workshops and classroom facilities allowed S&B to offer greater control over the training process and led to significant interest from within the vehicle industry. Notably, Stagecoach now sends all its apprentices to Bristol on four-year courses and the operator also provides surplus vehicles for the students to work on. Qualifications up to NVQ levels Two and Three can be achieved and each group is assessed to identify specific candidates who could be invited to take their training further and complete HND and HNC diplomas in management.

MAN-ERF UK also provides massive support for S&B, sending its own trainees and those of its nationwide dealer network. A number of vehicles and engines have been supplied for aspiring truck technicians to work on and companies like haulier Christian Salveson have also donated trucks.

Braking specialist Knorr-Bremse provided a large amount of disc and drum brake training equipment which is available to all students at the facility, but is primarily there for Knorr-Bremse trainees - who are sent along periodically for their own in-house training. S&B is currently involved in discussions with Society of Operations Engineers about developing a programme for brake technicians to obtain IRTEC licences should this become a mandatory requirement. The EU is aiming to introduce legislation where only a licensed and accredited technician can carry out work on vehicle braking systems - particularly commercial vehicles. The aim is to have the necessary information, equipment and trainers available should it become necessary.

> "the EU is aiming to introduce legislation where only a licensed technician can carry out work"

S&B has two classrooms fully equipped for 'virtual' diagnostics training

All S&B's running expenses are covered under the training exercise and any surplus is immediately re-invested in updating and expanding the facilities.

The original site was added to last year with the acquisition of more buildings nearby. These provided new classrooms for training, space to install a full-sized commercial spray booth, a computerised paint mixing system and a comprehensive fabrication shop. Next door is a sizeable, fully-equipped, light vehicle workshop for training on cars and small vans.

Spraying equipment, paint and tool suppliers have also been extremely generous in providing free materials and equipment for S&B. They feel that if the trainees and apprentices become familiar with their products they will, at a later stage, perhaps influence buying decisions within their respective companies - especially those who progress to management positions.

One of the CV workshops offers computerised diagnostic training and has the latest equipment, literally wall-to-wall. Each student has a workstation connected to the electrical system on a vehicle. Above each individual station

is a large indicator board depicting the individual systems aboard the vehicle. Students use this visualisation, combined with the computer to test and diagnose any faults uncovered. Training staff can introduce any number of faults, common or uncommon, via a control programme.

A classroom elsewhere in the building is similarly equipped - although there is no vehicle there for direct reference. However, the 'virtual' system works in exactly the same way and achieves the same results - allowing S&B to progress more students through diagnostics without so much pressure on time.

Students attending courses in Bristol have their travel fees and expenses paid by S&B and they are found accommodation under its own Home Stay scheme. Andy Frounks, head of curriculum - body and paint, said: "Previous attempts to find lodgings in hostels and hotels proved undesirable in a number of ways. There was little control over the students and at their age it sometimes proved unwise. The Home Stay programme is far more suitable. We arrange for them to stay with local families and this proves to be a far more stable environment where they have to abide by certain codes. We aim to keep them with the same families whenever they are here and this aids the building of relationships and bonding. It works very well."

Currently there are 650 students enrolled on courses at Bristol - among them a small percentage of female technicians and two are attending the body and paint course. Each year, all national students are invited to take part in a week-long team building exercise where they are encouraged to work together to overcome a range of problems.

S&B also runs an annual competition to find the top student. This year's design award went to a young man who designed a lightweight ambulance trailer for use in the African bush. Towed by a motorcycle, of a type commonly found in Africa, the trailer uses very basic construction techniques and materials so it can be repaired almost anywhere. The wheels and suspension are also derived from motorcycles.

The winner gets to spend two months in Africa with his project, introducing it to the teams who will build and use them to assist in ferrying people from outlying villages to health centres and hospitals for treatment.

S&B's chief executive, John Winter, said: "The commercial side has progressed rapidly since MAN ERF UK and Stagecoach came aboard. What is significant is Stagecoach's new approach to apprenticeships - showing vision and a forward-looking attitude. Effectively they are creating a Stagecoach academy - and while this is not a cheap exercise it is seen as a way to get young people to develop within a progressive company. Previous schemes they were involved with employed a number of local colleges, but they were unable to offer the same dedicated programmes as S&B."

> **What is significant is Stagecoach's new approach to apprenticeship - showing vision and thinking**

Mr Winter added that S&B had been the only training facility in the country to have achieved Level One status. It currently stands at Level Two, although this is because the criteria have all been changed and no other training facility in the country has been able to achieve the new level.

■ S&B Training is located in Princess Street, Bedminster, Bristol, BS3 4AG - five minutes from Temple Meads station. For further information contact Andy Frounks on 07986 188980. An open day has been planned for June 28 - when employers and potential students are invited to inspect the premises and see the range of courses available.

Above: Stagecoach provides surplus vehicles for use in its dedicated training workshop

Below: Knorr-Bremse braking equipment is used for in-house courses and is also available to general trainee technicians

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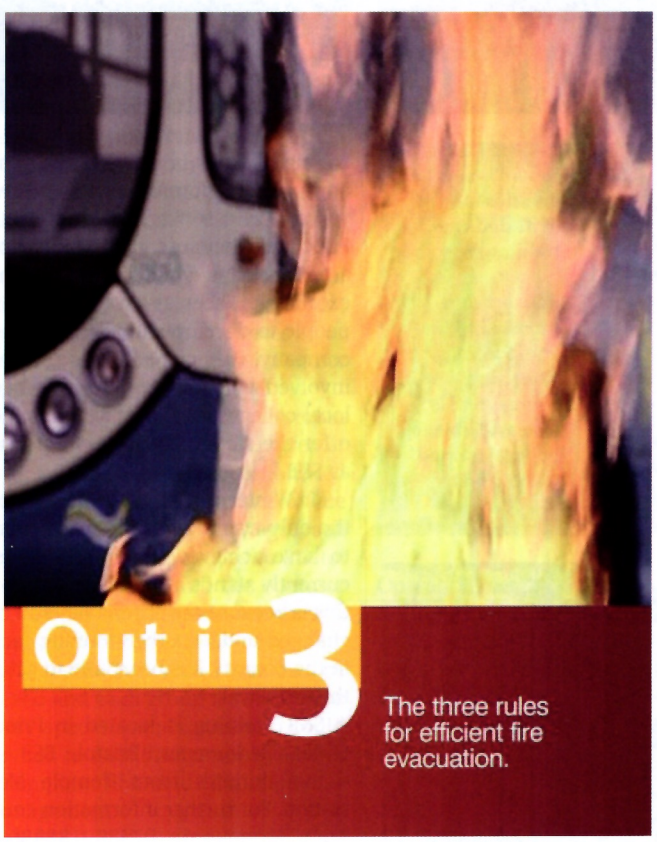
Fax: 01633 440591

For more information take a look at our website or contact Adrian Gettins on any of the above numbers.



GoSkills
Moving skills forward

GoSkills is the Sector Skills Council *(SSC)* for Passenger Transport. Operating throughout
the UK, it is an employer-led organisation that assists employers and operators in improving their business performance through people and skills.
As part of its commitment to promoting best health & safety practice, ***GoSkills*** has developed,in partnership with *Transport Training Skills* (TTS), a fire evacuation training resource.
On average ***500*** people are killed or injured each year as a result of vehicle fires. Statistics also indicate that over ***800*** fires occur annually in buses, coaches and minibuses.
In any year, the odds of any passenger-carrying vehicle being involved in a fire are approximately ***1 in 100***.
Efficient vehicle evacuation can, therefore, be essential - particularly where vulnerable passengers such as children, the elderly and people with disabilities are carried.
In the event of a fire or other emergency, how would *you* evacuate passengers quickly and efficiently? What assistance would people with disabilities require?
Out in 3 is a highly participative training programme that combines vital information on efficient emergency evacuation with an opportunity to put theory into practice, via structured practical exercises that utilise a smoke-machine.
Out in 3 training can be provided at your premises for only £975 (*£875 to CPT members*).
Accommodating up to 30 delegates per day, training can work out at less than £30 per delegate. Training for Trainers courses are also available.
Please contact me with more details about ***Out in 3*** training:

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Email: info@goskills.org - Web: www.goskills.org

Name:
Job Title:
Company:
Address:
Postcode:
Tel:
Email:
CPT Membership No:
I am interested in: *(please tick)*
Out in 3 Training Number of Drivers (approx)
Training for Trainers Number of Trainers (approx)

SPECIAL CBW FEATURE

VOSA training... from the horse's mouth!

The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) provides a range of licensing, testing and enforcement services.

With the aim of improving the roadworthiness standards of vehicles ensuring the compliance of operators and drivers with road legislation, and supporting the independent traffic commissioners, VOSA's services come with the approval of the system which ultimately polices the quality of maintenance.

As well as providing statutory education and advice, VOSA offers high quality, competitive commercial training, DVDs and seminars in all aspects of transport legislation. Its aim, it says, is to help operators improve the operation and efficiency of your business and increase you company's compliance with road transport regulations.

VOSA facilities comprise of regional training sites and a nation-wide network of trainers. VOSA delivers training to the transport industry in all areas of transport operation. We offer operator and driver courses to keep you up to date with the current legislation and to understand how to comply with the requirements of the regulations.

VOSA courses are based on years of experience. Continual research and development means it regularly updates and improves its courses to cater for the changing needs of individuals and organisations.

Each of the skilled trainers are experts in their own subject field. They have been selected not only for their knowledge of various statutory requirements, but also for their industry background. Many are members of the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development or have the equivalent professional training qualifications.

Trainers are continually trained and evaluated to ensure that they deliver a consistently high standard. As well as working for and with operators, they are all involved with training VOSA enforcement staff.

Offering a wide range of relevant, up-to-date courses, VOSA says it's confident that operators will be able to find a course to suit, whatever the training need.

Among listed PSV courses this year are:

PSV inspection standards and procedures	3 or 5 days
PSV inspection procedures and standards including vehicle roadworthiness checks	5 days
PSV inspection procedures and standards – refresher	3 days
PSV vehicle roadworthiness checks	1 or 2 days
PSV advanced driver daily checks	1 day
PSV driver daily checks	1 day
PSV operator and driver courses	1 or 2 days
PSV air brakes	1 or 2 days
Disability Discrimination Act (1995)Training - PSV Accessibility Regulations	1 day

There are five core programmes delivered regularly at seven locations throughout the UK for easy accessibility and convenience. The majority of the courses featured in the training directory can also be delivered at operators' own premises, offering a cost-effective training solution. VOSA is even designing tailored or bespoke courses where needed.

■ For more details, go to the VOSA website at www.vosa.gov.uk, email commercial.training@vosa.gov.uk, or call 0117 954 3359

Overseas training/ consultancy

The Commercial team also undertakes a number of overseas consultancy and training projects related to testing/inspection and traffic enforcement. It has an extensive experience of assisting many other countries with the design and implementation of vehicle testing and enforcement and has a large overseas customer base in Europe as well as Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

GoSkills launches apprentice awards scheme

Following requests from employers in the sector, GoSkills is working in partnership with operators to develop a new Apprenticeship Awards scheme for the passenger transport sector.

The new annual awards scheme will recognise achievement in apprenticeships across the sector with the first awards ceremony due to take place in autumn 2006. Apprenticeships are increasingly playing a pivotal role in helping to address the skills needs of a range of industries within the passenger transport sector.

Each year, hundreds of young people in the sector embark on apprenticeships. The new apprenticeship awards scheme will give employers in the sector the chance to nominate their best apprentices for the opportunity to win an award in their respective category.

The new awards scheme will comprise an application process followed by shortlisting and culminating in an awards ceremony (in the first year, five awards will be available reflecting the five apprenticeship areas).

The scheme aims to promote the benefits of apprenticeships whilst also raising the profile of passenger transport. A 'task and finish' working group comprising of sector employers has been set up to oversee the scheme and to ensure that it meets the needs of industry.

GoSkills' Director of Workforce Development, Vicki Ball said: "I'm delighted that we are establishing this new Apprenticeship Awards scheme as it is important that we celebrate publicly the success of apprentices and employers in the sector in raising skills levels. This is an opportunity to raise awareness of the commitment to training and excellence in the sector.

Vicki Ball

"We are fortunate to have support from employers in determining how the scheme should work."

■ For more information about the Passenger Transport Apprenticeship Awards Scheme email apprenticeshipawards@goskills.org. GoSkills is also interested in talking to potential sponsors of each of the five apprenticeship awards. For a discussion of sponsorship opportunities, please contact Vicki Ball on 0121 625 5522 or by emailing vicki.ball@goskills.org.

In house operator training

ADG training offers operators a one-stop-shop for their training requirements. The company can provide operators with a full suite of courses aimed at CPC holders, BSOG training, NVQ courses and driving assessments. Courses can be run at the company's own facilities or in-house if sufficient numbers are available. Weekend home study courses are also available.

ADG training's Adrian Gettins believes that there has never been more demand for professional training in the PCV industry.

"No matter what line of business you are in I don't think all of us could pass the theory test and driving test first time," he told *CBW*. "So why not take steps to improve our driving skills? Our company travels around about 45,000 miles a year and the nonsense we see is unbelievable. That's from cars driving in bus lanes; buses moving away from stops as a cyclist is 2/3 of the way along the bus; lorries in the 3rd lane on the motorway; Traffic attempting to go up a one way street the wrong way.

"Within our company portfolio we have two solutions to this problem. We do Fleet Driver Analysis or if you want to train your staff to a better standard we offer NVQ training which includes driving and customers awareness courses. All of this does not inconvenience your normal working day because the instructor sits in on his duty to assess the standard of service he offers and then at the end of the shift or at a convenient time we sit down and discuss the driver's approach to the job and try and improve the level of service given to the public."

Mr Gettins believes that all of the transport industries are suffering because of the low image of the job.

Other areas covered by ADG Training include: Is your company using the DDA Act to its best ability for you; Is your workplace user friendly when was the last time you carried out a full risk assessment on both the workshop and office/yard. The company offers a full service in these fields.

With regard to the CPC holder, Mr Gettins has again identified key issues for operators. "What will you do if your designated transport manager dies? Who will be the next CPC holder to replace him/her? Why not have more than one CPC Holder in your company then the problem will not arise; it also means that one holder will have responsibilities for one side of things and each could report to each other - remember a problem shared is a problem halved. We can either send an instructor to your area (if there is sufficient numbers interested) or we can set up a residential course in Caerphilly, south Wales."

For Section 19 companies and Bus companies, ADG training in BSOG - formally Fuel Duty Rebate. From setting up the commercial service or gaining a council contract to sending in the registration forms to the traffic area and registering your interest in BSOG ADG do the lot. All operators do is run the service and keep adequate records while ADG do the rest.

When did you last carry out a full risk assessment on your workshop?

Services to the PCV industry:

1. BSOG for Bus Services or Section 19 permit holders.
2. Driving Assessments to improve there standard
3. NVQ Training at you location in there normal working day.
4. CPC studies either residential in Caerphilly South Wales or at you location if sufficient numbers or Home Study with week-end training available.

■ For more information contact Adrian Gettins on Tel: 01633 441491. Mob: 07885874860
a.dgettins@btinternet.com
www.adgtraining.com

Minimise your risk

COMMON causes of injury in the coach industry come from manual handling of luggage – with sprains, pulled muscles, fractures and hernias often caused by incorrect handling procedures.

Minimise Your Risk points out employers have a legal responsibility to ensure drivers are adequately trained under basic health & safety legislation and specific manual handling regulations. This training must be carried out and be accompanied by a signed training record if operators are to avoid facing expensive settlements in claims and possible prosecution by the HSE.

Minimise Your Risk, in association with Scriptographic Publications, has produced a manual handling booklet called Handling Luggage – reducing risk of injury, to assist as part of any training course.

The publication also carries a 'test of knowledge' page which can be removed after training, signed and kept on the employee's file as evidence of the operator's compliance with the legislation.

■ Details and a complimentary booklet are available by calling 01273 580189, e-mail info@minimiseyourrisk.co.uk

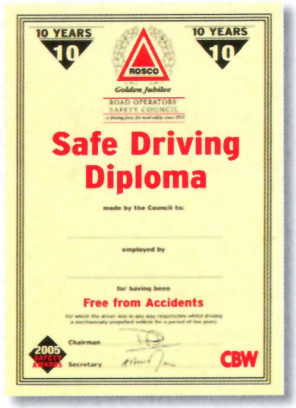
ROSCO spurs development

The Road Operators' Safety Council is a big encouragement for drivers, monitoring the safe driving of 45,000 of them and issuing Safe Driving Certificates to the best.

A membership organisation, ROSCO also produces safety material such as posters for the workplace, flagging up such hazards as low bridges, cyclists and speed to remind drivers of their responsibilities. Regular newsletters keep members informed of the lates safety issues.

The culmination of ROSCO's safe driving certificates comes in autumn, when a panel reviews the best, accident-free drivers entered in the Safe Driver of the Year awards. The award is usually made during the annual coach and bus exhibition.

To enrol your drivers with ROSCO see the website www.rosco.org.uk, or email rosco-oxford@supanet.com



Monitor your driving

Driving Services was established in 1988 to provide comprehensive and effective driver training and motor fleet risk management services. Its holistic approach draws on experience and best practice, and complements any fleet initiatives already in place.

Companies with fleets of all sizes, in virtually every industry sector, benefit from the services which are tailored to individual needs and requirements.

Trainers are based throughout the UK and are covered by the Driving Services' ISO 9002 quality accreditation and Investors in People status to provide consistency and quality.

DrivingMonitor, the most comprehensive tool of its kind, is the latest edition to the portfolio of services.

DrivingMonitor provides on-line assessments, training and a complete driver management tool.

Train online at www.drivingmonitor.com

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www.transportoffice.gov.uk

An executive agency of the Department for Transport

RENAULT MASTER dCi 120 9-SEAT MINIBUS

Above: Nine-seat Renault Master offers increased passenger space and versatility Right: Plenty of luggage capacity – ideal for shuttle operation. Lower right: Treble seat opposite entrance restricts access slightly

Master and servant

Renault is on a roll in the light commercial vehicle sector. The French giant has a new website and a new range of factory-built minibuses. *CBW* takes a look at the nine-seat Master

By Steve Walker

Renault has been making a conspicuous effort to raise the profile of its light commercial vehicle products of late. An impressive new website at *www.renaultvans.co.uk*, a reorganised, dedicated LCV sales team and some exciting new products should all serve to elevate the French marque in the thinking of UK operators. What those in the PSV industry will be focusing on in particular, however, is the new range of factory-built Renault minibuses. We put a nine-seater Master dCi 120 model through its paces.

The Market

The introduction of an in-house 'Commercial Passenger Vehicle' range was viewed as a natural step by those with their hands on the tiller at Renault UK. After all, the marque was at the forefront when it came to popularising MPV people carriers in the private car sphere with the Espace and Scenic models. With this kind of passenger-carrying pedigree and a ready range of panel vans ripe for conversion already on the books, a line-up of factory-built Renault minibuses was always on the cards.

We've been taking a look at the nine-seater Master model, but there are also six and 16-seater versions of the Trafic and Master, respectively. Renault hopes that together these vehicles will claim a 10% share of a minibus market that now accounts for some 8,000 new vehicle sales annually in the UK. Renault LCV Brand Manager Louise O'Sullivan is predictably upbeat on the subject: "The UK market for smaller minibuses

and combi-style vehicles is growing at a faster rate here than anywhere else in Europe, so we're very optimistic that our two new nine-seater products in particular are ideally placed to take full advantage of this buoyant market."

The Product

The model we test here slots in at the lower end of the nine-seat Master line-up. It's based on a short wheelbase, low roof Master panel van with a 2,800kg gross vehicle weight and is available priced from £18,972 (basic). Standard equipment levels run to an RDS CD stereo, a trip computer, tinted glass and a driver's armrest, but electric windows and door mirrors are a £700 option that was included on our test vehicle.

The Master has an imposing front end with a deep bumper and the grille that is shared across the Renault commercial vehicle family. Thick side rubbing strips run between the wheelarches protecting the flanks from knocks and scrapes. Overall, the styling is routine large panel van stuff, which will be familiar to owners of the Master's Vauxhall Movano and Nissan Primastar sister vehicles.

The Practicalities

In the saloon area, the nine-seat Master feels like a panel van with seats bolted in. The conversion generally fails to go that

RENAULT MASTER dCi 120 9-SEAT MINIBUS

FAR LEFT: comfortable driver's seat with plenty of adjustment. LEFT: Practical dash layout with console-mounted gear shift. BOTTOM LEFT: Three-point seatbelts for passengers. BELOW: Styling will soon be updated

Above: Master has a proven track record for reliability and economy. Right: Headrests add to passenger comfort and safety

extra mile to deliver additional practicality and comfort for passengers. Having said that, the space is highly functional, with two rows of three separate seats behind the driver and front passengers. Headroom is more than adequate, as is legroom, and there's a pleasant, airy feel thanks to the large glass area with opening windows for the middle row.

Access to the Master's third row of seats is via the nearside sliding side-door and, while the aperture is wide enough, the end seats in the middle row do not tilt forward to facilitate simpler entries and exits. You have to manoeuvre yourself inside then shuffle along the bench to get to the end seat. This may be an issue for operators who regularly transport elderly passengers.

The highlight of the Master's interior has to be the luggage area. There's a full 3.0m^3 of luggage space back there behind the third row and that's a real benefit, especially when many nine-seat models (like Renault's own Trafic, for example) have such limited luggage capacity. In the front, there's extensive use of tough grey plastics, which hide the dust well but may not be to everyone's taste, and a good array of storage space including deep door pockets.

The Master has M1 certified seat and seatbelt anchorage throughout with ABS brakes, brakeforce distribution, and a driver's airbag coming as standard.

The Drive

Renault's dCi 120 common-rail diesel engine actually packs just 115bhp, but it's noticeably more flexible and punchy than the dCi 90 option (90bhp, as its name suggests). The other alternative is the dCi 100 that offers a full 100bhp, but is only available with Renault's excellent Quickshift6 sequential clutchless gearbox.

Our dCi 120 model was fitted with a six-speed manual 'box, but Quickshift6 is also available as an option with this engine.

The gearchange is light and easy to operate in a smooth manner, while the flatly-mounted steering wheel is well weighted and comfortable to use. The driver's seat offers plenty of adjustment and visibility is good thanks to large wing mirrors. The front seats are mounted on a raised floor section, letting the driver see out of the back in the rear view mirror over the heads of his passengers.

Renault's dCi technology delivers good refinement with a faint turbocharger whine just audible above the rumble of the engine under acceleration.

The presence of a sixth gear helps the dCi 120 achieve over 36mpg on motorway trips and a strong torque rating means the engine should remain unfazed, even if the 887kg payload capacity is approached.

The Verdict

With spacious passenger accommodation and excellent luggage capacity, the nine-seat dCi 120 Renault Master is a solid, workmanlike minibus product. It doesn't offer the level of passenger comfort or the specialist features found in some more comprehensive minibus conversions, and the interior does feel a little Spartan in places, but it does the job for which it was designed. This Master is the kind of vehicle that should lend itself well to the needs of schools, hotels, construction companies and other operators undertaking short trips with passengers and cargo in tow.

FACT FILE

Base Vehicle Renault Master short wheelbase/low roof panel van
Seating Driver + eight passengers
Dimensions length/width/height mm 4888/2359/2216
Gross Vehicle Weight 2,800kg
Standard Safety Features M1 certified three-point seatbelts, driver's airbag, ABS with EBD
Warranty three-year/60,000-mile inc roadside assistance
Engine 2.5-litre dCi diesel
Max Power 115bhp @ 3,500rpm
Max Torque 290Nm @ 1,600rpm
Top Speed 90mph
Fuel Economy 26.4 (urban), 36.7 (extra urban), 31.7 (combined)
Gearbox 6-speed manual
Contact Renault UK *www.renaultvans.co.uk*

VERDICT

Who's it for?
Operators needing to move nine people plus a generous helping of luggage or equipment. The strong engine means that even heavy-duty work shouldn't be a problem.

Any alternatives?
Nine-seat conversions of the leading large panel vans like Ford's Transit, Citroen's Relay and Vauxhall's Movano

- ☺ Interior space
- ☺ Luggage capacity
- ☺ Robust construction
- ☹ Basic interior
- ☹ Bland styling
- ☹ Access to third row

The Bottom Line
A very capable and adaptable minibus without the flair of some rival nine-seaters. A strong range of engines and transmissions count in its favour.

employment law

Coach and Bus Week has come up with what really must be a world first – FREE advice from a lawyer! You're just a phone call away from solving your employment problem

CBW has teamed up with specialist Transport Lawyers Stone King LLP to offer readers exclusive access to free Employment Law Telephone Seminars.

Stone King LLP is hosting a series of telephone seminars to answer questions raised by readers.

The idea is simple; just let us know your question in advance, then if you're selected, join a lively telephone conference with other operators to discuss your question and others.

Maybe you're worried about the new 'ageism' rules; will that stop you advertising for young tour drivers... or even asking for people with long experience? Do you have to give a second chance to a driver who's rude to your customers? What employment rights does your new and useless receptionist have?

If you want to join in, simply email your name, your contact number and your question to peterwoodhouse@stoneking.co.uk. Alternatively, fax the information to 01225 33 54 37.

Stone King LLP will then send you an invitation to the telephone seminar to be held with an Employment Law specialist and other bus and coach operators to discuss your query. This is an invaluable opportunity to gain expert legal opinion and to discuss with other operators common issues affecting employment in the industry.

The first seminar is to be held soon. Places are very limited so please reserve your place as soon as possible

Send for FREE legal advice

Fax 01225 335437

Name

Company

Position

My question is

* It will be appreciated that the seminars are not a substitute for bespoke legal advice and by their nature can provide only general comment. If you have a need for specific legal advice either contact your own solicitor or Peter Woodhouse on peterwoodhouse@stoneking.co.uk

Products

McKENNA BROS & MOBITEC SECURE LOTHIAN DEAL

Destination equipment specialist Mckenna Brothers and digital display manufacturer Mobitec are to be included in the specification of 85 Wrightbus-bodied vehicles being supplied later this year.

Commercial director Derek Dawson said: "We have worked closely with Lothian over the last couple of years in the development of Smartblind.

"We fully believe we now have a product which achieces the visual impact Lothian Buses requires, and, from an operational perspective, it is engineered to cope with today's difficult operating environment."

Later this year a new sign is scheduled for launch and this will be fitted to the Lothian vehicles. Mr Dawson added: "This new development brings something different to the market. It has been developed with customer involvement – which we feel is very important for the future."

■ Contact McKenna Bros on 0161 655 3244, website www.mckennabrothers.co.uk

NEW WEBSITE PROVES POPULAR

Somers Total Kare, the mobile column lift and vehicle lift specialist, has developed a new internet website – www.somerstotalkare.co.uk

The company says it is delighted by customer response to the new-look portal, which now offers comprehensive product information as well as details of the service and maintenance packages on offer and an on-line ordering service – which has been very popular for customers seeking spare parts.

MOTOROLA MOTOTRBO DIGITAL TWO-WAY RADIO

MOTOTRBO is Motorola's new professional digital two-way radio system – a digital communications platform that combines the best of two-way radio with digital technology to deliver increased capacity and spectral efficiency, integrated data applications and enhanced voice communications.

MOTOTRBO utilises a two-slot Time Division Multiple Access (TDMA) digital technology to improve basic functionality and system performance, including increased system capacity, improved audio quality, longer battery life, built-in privacy, and enhanced call signalling and control capabilities for future enhancements such as emergency pre-emption.

In addition, organisations have access to integrated data applications such as GPS-based location tracking, text messaging and other IP data applications. MOTOTRBO is a comprehensive dual mode (analogue and digital) system including repeater, mobile and portable units, data applications, accessories and services making it possible for professional businesses to easily and affordably migrate to a digital platform at their own pace.

MOTOTRBO was designed to meet the expanding needs of business users – including transportation operators – especially those requiring reliable business critical communications combined with the higher performance capabilities digital technology can provide.

"Professional businesses are currently relying on a variety of devices to meet their communication needs, including combinations of licensed and unlicensed analogue radios and push-to-talk over cellular products," said Craig Chenicek, director of Motorola Radio Products. "Recognising that current communication tools are reaching their functional limits for this market, Motorola developed a digital two-way radio system that provides voice and data capability on one device without compromising quality, reliability or mobility."

By leveraging TDMA technology, MOTOTRBO doubles the effective capacity of a customer's repeater channels within the 12.5kHz channel structure already utilised throughout the world. This straightforward re-use of spectrum allows more users on the system and with no changes to licensing requirements, which can increase the customer's capacity for wireless voice and data communications. In addition, MOTOTRBO's platform enables a single repeater to deliver the benefits of two analogue repeaters, allowing businesses to realise up to a 50% reduction in repeater costs compared with equivalent analogue systems. And MOTOTRBO provides a longer talk time with up to a 40 percent longer battery life than comparable analogue radios.

MOTOTRBO is targeted for shipment in the United States, Canada, Europe, the Middle East and Africa in Q4 2006.

BOOK EARLY FOR EMPLOYEE FLU JABS

Medicals Direct, the Middlesex-based company offering occupational medical services throughout the UK, is urging employers to plan well ahead this year if they wish to offer workplace flu jabs to their staff and will, itself, be taking bookings now for the round of vaccinations scheduled to commence in Autumn 2006.

Several factors are expected to lead to a surge in demand for this increasingly popular employee benefit. One is the evident economic benefit to employers in having a flu-protected rather than a flu-vulnerable workforce. Medicals Direct suggests most medical experts agree the likelihood we will suffer a flu pandemic increases each year. Another is the knowledge that UK vaccine supplies ran out in 2005 through a government failure to order sufficient stocks. Also significant is the growing fear that the highly pathogenic H5N1 bird flu virus could 'piggy-back' on the traditional flu virus and mutate into a form that is more readily transmissible between humans.

The company's Mobile Vaccination Service offers companies the chance to have a fully-trained nurse visit their premises to administer vaccinations to all members of staff who wish to be protected against the seasonal flu virus. The only requirement on the part of the staff-member is that he/she must complete a simple consent form in advance which checks for vaccination contraindications (principally allergy to eggs).

David Patterson, clinics director for Medicals Direct, said: "It's very cost-efficient for the employer. At £12.50 – for those companies who book before the end of June – the cost of vaccinating an employee is only a fraction of the cost of paying sick leave when someone is actually stricken with the flu. The influenza virus has a nasty habit of spreading right the way through the workforce. In the event of a flu epidemic striking a company whose staff is completely unprotected, business could all but grind to a halt."

Provided companies can organise a minimum number of 10 employees to be vaccinated in a single visit, the cost per jab will only be £12.50. This is against a cost of £15 per vaccination for bookings made after June 30 or for smaller groups of employees (minimum five). There will also be an administrative cost of £25 per nurse, per day to cover the travel costs of the nurses who administer flu jabs.

■ Contact Mike Benton. Tel: 020 8416 1525. E-mail: mbenton@medicalsdirect.com . Website: www.medicalsdirect.com

PLYMOUTH CITY BUS INVESTS IN LOOK CCTV SYSTEMS

Plymouth City Bus is equipping its entire bus fleet with LOOK CCTV systems.

The move follows a successful trial and evaluation of on-board CCTV that lead to reduction in insurance claims.

The new contract is worth about £300,000.

In 2004-5, Plymouth City Bus fitted eight buses with LOOK CCTV systems under a Plymouth City Council and Local Education Authority match-funding initiative as well as fitting a further 16 brand new vehicles with CCTV at its own expense. The success of CCTV has prompted Plymouth City Bus to self-fund retrofitting CCTV for a further 101 buses.

"We've been very pleased with the way CCTV has assisted us with investigating poor behaviour on school bus services and tackling accident claims. This contract will cover retrofitting our existing fleet and gives us a consistent CCTV system making management and service far easier," said Plymouth City Bus Operations Director, Phil Smith.

The LOOK digital CCTV system offers high-resolution images, and ease of customisation and management. The CCTV system supports six cameras and is being fitted to a mix of lowfloor ADL Dart and Mercedes Citaro citybuses.

■ Details from LOOK CCTV on 01253 891222 or e-mail sales@lookcctv.com

Call EvoBus UK Tel: 02476 626046

Firstreg	Chassis	Body	Seats
26-Jun-00	Iveco Mago CC8.E18	Indcar Maxim	29
14-Oct-93	Man	Berkhof Excellence 1000	33
9-Feb-98	Man 11-220	Berkhof Excellence 1000	35
1-Mar-02	Man 13-220	Berkhof Axial 10m	34
26-Apr-01	Mercedes-Benz 0614D Vario	Crest Conversion	24
26-Apr-99	Mercedes-Benz 0814D Vario	Autobus Nouvelle 2	20
20-Oct-02	Mercedes-Benz 1223L	Optare Solera 2	39
25-Mar-03	Mercedes-Benz 411 CDI	Sprinter Accessable Bus	9 + 4
1-Jun-05	Mercedes-Benz LF 616 CDI	Sprinter 25 Low Floor Bus	21+ 4
5-May-98	Volvo B9M	Jonckheere Mistral 50	35
15-May-98	Volvo B9M	Jonckheere Mistral 50	35

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BATTERSBY

A further pair of Plaxton-bodied Volvo B12Bs have joined the fleet of long-established (1949) Battersby Silver Grey in Morecambe.

Both coaches are to operate in Leger Tours livery - one is a 12m-long 36-seater, for the Silver Service programme, while the other is a 12.8m coach with 49 seats, providing extra legroom for the company's customers.

Having standardised on Plaxton-bodied Volvos, Battersby Silver Grey now operates 22 rear-engined B12Bs and two mid-engined B12Ms. The latest vehicles have Volvo's I-Shift transmission, following on from its success in previous deliveries.

The Plaxton/Volvo combination is one which satisfies Battersby Silver Grey director Mark Harrison: "Passengers enjoy the high standard of comfort and the ride quality. The drivers like the I-Shift transmission and our fitters find the rear-mounted engine and the multiplexed electrics easy to work on."

High standards of reliability and good fuel economy are further plus points.

Frequent fleet replacements mean the oldest coach in the Battersby line up is just four years old.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo B12B/ Plaxton
Engine Volvo DH12
Transmission I-Shift
Seats 36/49
Supplied by Plaxton, 01909 551166

FIRST

A pair of 24-seat Optare Solos have entered service with First as part of a strategy aimed at making local bus services in Todmorden more accessible to mobility-impaired passengers.

They form part of the MetroConnect services across West Yorkshire run by West Yorkshire PTE under the Metro brand name. Metro's service is supported by funding from the Department for Transport designated for a project to enhance Todmorden's bus services. As a result, several new services have been introduced and frequency improved on some of the more heavily-used services.

"I'm pleased that we are able to introduce these new vehicles to the MetroConnect Todmorden network," said Neil Holt, Assistant Director, Transport Co-ordination at Metro. "We know that the services are well-used and past experience has shown that introducing modern, passenger-friendly vehicles such as these will attract even greater numbers onto them."

The Todmorden area has numerous narrow roads, making the 7.8 metre long, 2.33 metre wide SlimLine Solos well-suited to the routes and powerful enough to cope with the steep hills.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Optare Slimline
Engine M-B OM904LA 147bhp
Transmission Allison 2000 automatic
Seats 24
Spec Rack for two cycles, Mobitec LED destination display
Supplied by Optare, 0113 264 5182

FAIRLINE

Glasgow's Fairline services has taken delivery of three Optare Solos, run on a shared high-frequency shuttle service to Glasgow airport that operates seven days a week and at 10 minute intervals during peak hours.

Fairline Coaches owner Pawan Sood says the Solos are ideally suited to the service. "We needed a nippy bus that could cope easily with congested city centre conditions as well as maintaining good journey times on the motorway. It had to have good passenger capacity and plenty of room for luggage as well as being DDA compliant. And it needed to look stylish. Solo scores on all these points. The relatively compact size and excellent visibility of Solo enables the driver to cope more easily with the city traffic. They're also automatics, making them simpler to drive."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Optare Solo
Engine M-B OM904LA 147bhp
Transmission Allison 2000 automatic
Seats 21 + six tip-ups
Supplied by Optare, 0113 264 5182

McGILLS

McGills Bus Service has become the first Scottish operator to introduce Mercedes-Benz Citaros. Both buses will operate on the company's busy service between Greenock and Largs. They are the company's first 12m single-deck buses; until now McGills has specified large midibuses for its fleet.

"Passenger numbers have been rising," explained James Easdale, managing director, "and it was clearly time to invest in larger vehicles. One of the attractions of the Citaro is that it is a complete EvoBus product, so whether you are seeking service information or have a problem with the vehicle there is just one point of contact. If we are to encourage people out of their cars and on to public transport, we need to ensure that the vehicles we are offering are attractive. Congestion and pollution are important issues, and we as operators have a part to play in addressing these issues by providing a top-class service."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Mercedes Benz Citaro
Engine OM906 279bhp
Transmission ZF Ecomat five-speed auto
Seats 42
Spec Aircon
Supplied by Evobus, 02476 626000

Matt Shenton heads growing Bus and Coach Glazing business

Plaxton has strengthened its Bus and Coach Glazing business with the appointment of Matt Shenton as general manager.

Matt heads up the Bus and Coach Glazing team as the business opens a new depot at Bridgwater, in Somerset, to complete its coverage of the UK mainland. This brings to four the number of Bus and Coach Glazing locations, with the others at Harlow, Sheffield (Anston) and Glasgow.

"Bus and Coach Glazing can now offer 24-hour glass replacement country-wide," says Matt Shenton. "As the only nationwide specialist in this sector we are now working to expand the business."

Matt has joined Bus and Coach Glazing from Alexander Dennis, a company he worked with from 2001, initially establishing an all-makes parts operation and more recently working on new vehicle sales. Before that he was an engineering manager with Stagecoach Devon.

"Matt brings an ideal combination of skills to this important post," says Mike Keaney, Plaxton managing director. "He has experience in bus operation, and therefore understands the pressures which operators face, and he also has sales experience gained in both aftermarket and vehicle sales."

Bus and Coach Glazing provides glass for all popular makes and model of bus and coach and has teams of mobile technicians at each of its four bases. They operate from fully-equipped vans that are literally mobile workshops, containing equipment for all eventualities. Satellite tracking ensures the nearest technician can be allocated to each job, helping to reduce vehicle downtime for customers.

Bus and Coach Glazing operates a round-the-clock service, and can supply glass for fitment by the operator, or alternatively provide a complete fitting service, at the operator's premises or at any other suitable location - if a vehicle suffers glass damage while on tour, for example.

A single free phone call - 0800 22 00 77 - connects customers to Bus and Coach Glazing. Calls are handled by people with technical knowledge and not by a call centre, which helps ensure the correct identification of the replacement glass required.

Matt Shenton: new general manager at Bus and Coach Glazing

Former driver in charge

Former First The Potteries managing director Bob Hamilton has switched to the driving seat at First South Yorkshire.

The former bus driver takes control from Gary Nolan, who announced his departure in March after a troubled spell as managing director of First.

Mr Nolan, the man who rose through the ranks from bus conductor, left after several run-ins with the South Yorkshire Transport Authority.

The company came in for criticism after raising fares three times in a year and bringing in service cuts. It let to the SYPTA taking the unprecedented step of passing a vote of no confidence in the bus firm.

Mr Hamilton (53) takes over the top job with the promise to deliver a better bus service across the region.

He will take up his new role on June 15 following a two-year stint as managing director at First Potteries.

He rejoins the South Yorkshire team having worked with the company from 1997 until 2003, when he reached the post of operations director.

His appointment comes as he celebrates 30 years in the industry, having started as a bus driver in 1976 for National Bus Company.

New boss: Bob Hamilton

New appointment at Harry Ferguson

Brian Ferguson has announced the appointment of George Stratford as coach sales manager, to work alongside Gordon Robertson. Brian says: "We look forward to drawing on George's wealth of experience."

George says: "I have been impressed with the dynamic progress of the company during their short time in the industry. They sold over 100 vehicles last year and I believe with the imminent launch of the Esker Divo coach, the potential to progress even further is quite substantial"

George can be contacted on 07786 118 112.

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1989 F REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS
Cummins L10/ZF, Northern Counties semi low height body, 75 seats, large choice

1990 G REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS,
Gardner 6LXB/ZF automatic, Alexander 76 seat bodies.

1983/4 A/B REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS,
Gardner 6LXB, ECW 77 seat lowheight bodies, recent retrims.

1988 E REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS,
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1983 LEYLAND TIGERS
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1991-92 LEYLAND OLYMPIANS
Cummins L10/ZF, Alexander R type bodies, either 74 seat dual door or 78 single door, large choice

1997 P REG MCW METRORIDER
25 seaters, large selection

1995 M REG VOLVO B6'S,
Volvo engines, ZF gearboxes, Alexander 40-seat bodies, good selection

1999 PP IVECO EURO MIDI
Indcar Maxim, 29 seats, air-con, TV, video, extremely good condition, supplied with new test.

1989 PP DENNIS CONDORS
Gardner/Voith, Duple Metsec bodies, 2 door, 106 seaters

1993 K REG DENNIS DART,
Cummins/Allison, 40 seater, Wrights bodies

1997 P REG VOLVO OLYMPIANS,
Alexander bodies, 2 doors, 68 seats, or can be single doored and upseated to 78

1995 M REG VOLVO OLYMPIAN,
Volvo/Voith, Alexander body, 82 seats , new test.

1990 DENNIS CONDORS,
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1990 G REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS
Cummins L10/ZF, Northern Counties body, 1 door, 79 seats

1986 C REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS
ECW Lowheight bodies, 77 seats, Cummins L10 engines, Voith 4 speed gearboxes (60mph)

1986/7 LEYLAND OLYMPIANS
Gardner/hydracyclic, ECW semi-low height bodies, 68 seats, long tests, some single door, 72 seaters also available

1994 L REG VOLVO
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53 seats, air conditioning, ZF 6 speed gearbox, ABS, power door.

1987 Daf Van Hool Alizee
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Coaches

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- 1996 Scania K113 Van Hool Alizee, 49 seats, manual, toilet, P/A, MOT.
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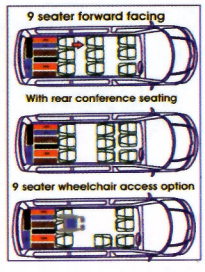

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Midicoach goes green

Many's the time a driver faced with opening a coach door on a hot day has said 'it's like a greenhouse in here...'

So it was perhaps a pretty obvious use for this expired coach on the Isle of Barra in Western Scotland. Equipped with wooden tables, the coach houses a selection of tender plants awaiting the Scottish summer.

Spotted and snapped by reader Alan Nicholls-Tydd, it's plainly a midicoach, but we're unsure which model. Maybe one of our readers knows...

No mystery to the winner

This story comes from *Saga* magazine, of a woman's holiday in Wales. Her letter praised the coach holiday she'd taken, saying that a particular highlight was a 'Guess the Destination' sweepstake run on the day the group went on their mystery tour.

She said the group had great fun jotting their guesses down before setting off, and only slight disappointment that the winner was... the driver!

Tall story

New seatbelt rules being proposed by the EU (and no doubt slavishly adopted in the UK) include a slightly odd demand.

If you carry children in a car - or presumably an eight-seater - the driver is responsible for ensuring they are belted up. Fair enough. But the definition of 'children' is someone under 12 years old, and less than 1.35 metres tall.

So now drivers have not only to carry a first aid kit, window hammers and other paraphernalia, but also a tape measure... in metric

Two minute interview

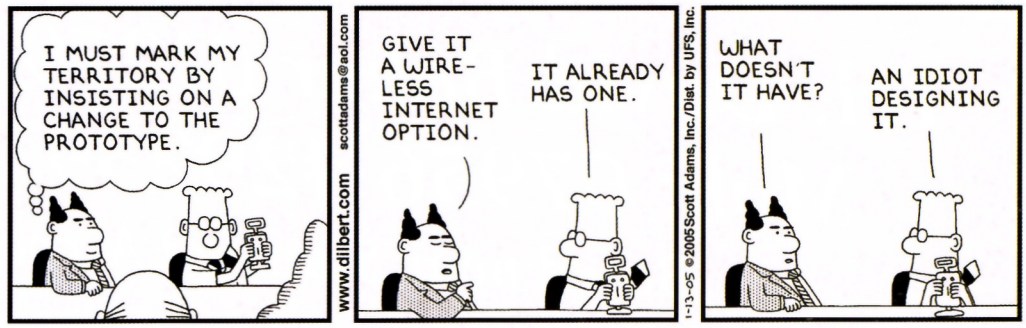
Full name Dan Rothwell
Age 29
Occupation Director and founder of Broad Oak Asset Finance Ltd
Will there be more passengers on coaches and buses in the future? Without a doubt!
Who will they be? With increased numbers of cars on the roads, and a big push for a greener Britain, we are seeing impressive investment by district and city councils in providing quick and easy routes in and out of major towns and cities to promote the use of park and ride facilities. The figures from the SMMT speak for themselves, with an increase of 37.4% for registrations of coaches and buses in March this year alone!
Which recent legislation has been most irritating or useless? Although the transition from analogue to digital tacho was a step in the right direction, the uncertainty over exact deadlines gave the industry a huge headache that could easily have been avoided with clear and concise legislation.
Give the industry's business managers 20 words of helpful advice... Although I feel they could probably teach me a thing or two, I would suggest staying at the forefront of legislation changes and being the first to react, thus maintaining a high degree of service and increasing revenues.
When you got your first job in the industry, was it love at first sight? My first day in finance was the best day of my life. Being young and enthusiastic, I was able to see through the controversy surrounding many industries' financial requirements, so I decided to establish a company that provided exactly what the customer required rather than just offering what had been traditionally available.
Which vehicle - coach, bus, motorcycle or car - do you love the most, and why? I love the traditional Routemaster. It's London's classic red double-decker bus used in the 1960s and is a symbol of the capital as much as Big Ben or the River Thames.
If you asked your best friend or partner, what would they say is your worst attribute? I am not the most patient of people. If I see that something makes sense, I tend to just go for it.
At your ideal dinner party, what would be the main course? The main course would have to be a succulent leg of lamb cooked to perfection with rosemary and garlic. I learnt this dish whilst living in Greece and it even impressed the mother in law!
And in your glass? A red Bordeaux

Googled...

http://www.irwinmitchell.com/RecentWork/Coachcrashesabroad.htm

A chilling reminder of the consequences of poor operational standards is brought to us by Irwin Mitchell, a law firm specialising in coach accident claims. Among documented cases is one which saw £14m awarded in compensation to passengers on a coach in Las Vegas in 2000. Irwin Mitchell has successfully claimed for accidents all over thw world. True, not many involved British operators, but the message that the risk is often directly related to mileage isn't lost on us....

Dilbert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- **SPECIALISE IN INSURANCE WORK**
- Replacement Stretch Panels
- Re-Sprays
- Refurbish vehicles with updated front and backs
- All accident repairs big or small on all makes of vehicles
- Manufacture Body Panels
- Mobile Body Repairs
- Emergency repair service to get vehicle back on the road *(European Cover)*
- NO JOB TOO BIG OR TOO SMALL
- Fleet Maintenance

Tel: David Baker 01279 730888

Mob: 07956 429239 (anytime)

Based near Stansted Airport